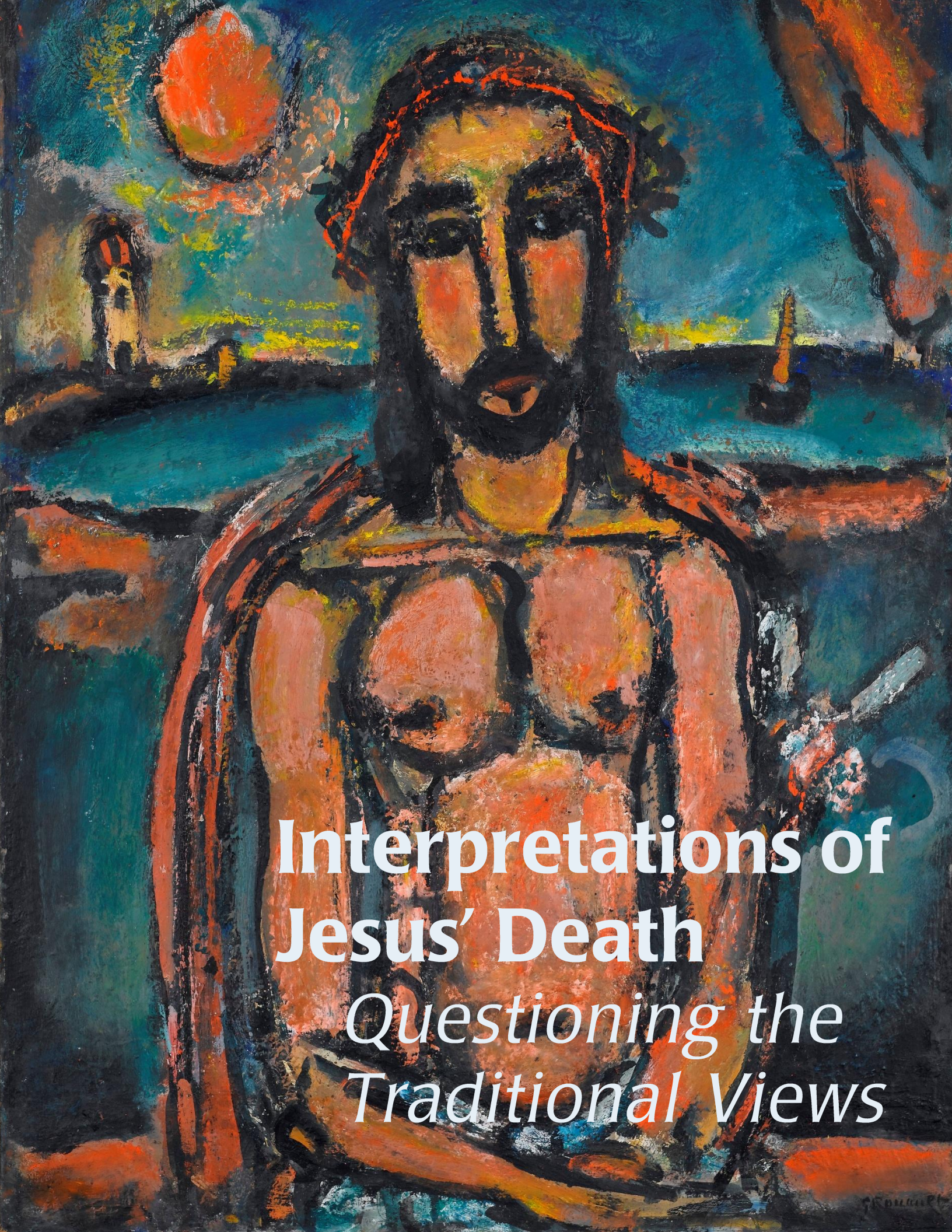

Interpretations of Jesus' Death

Questioning the Traditional Views

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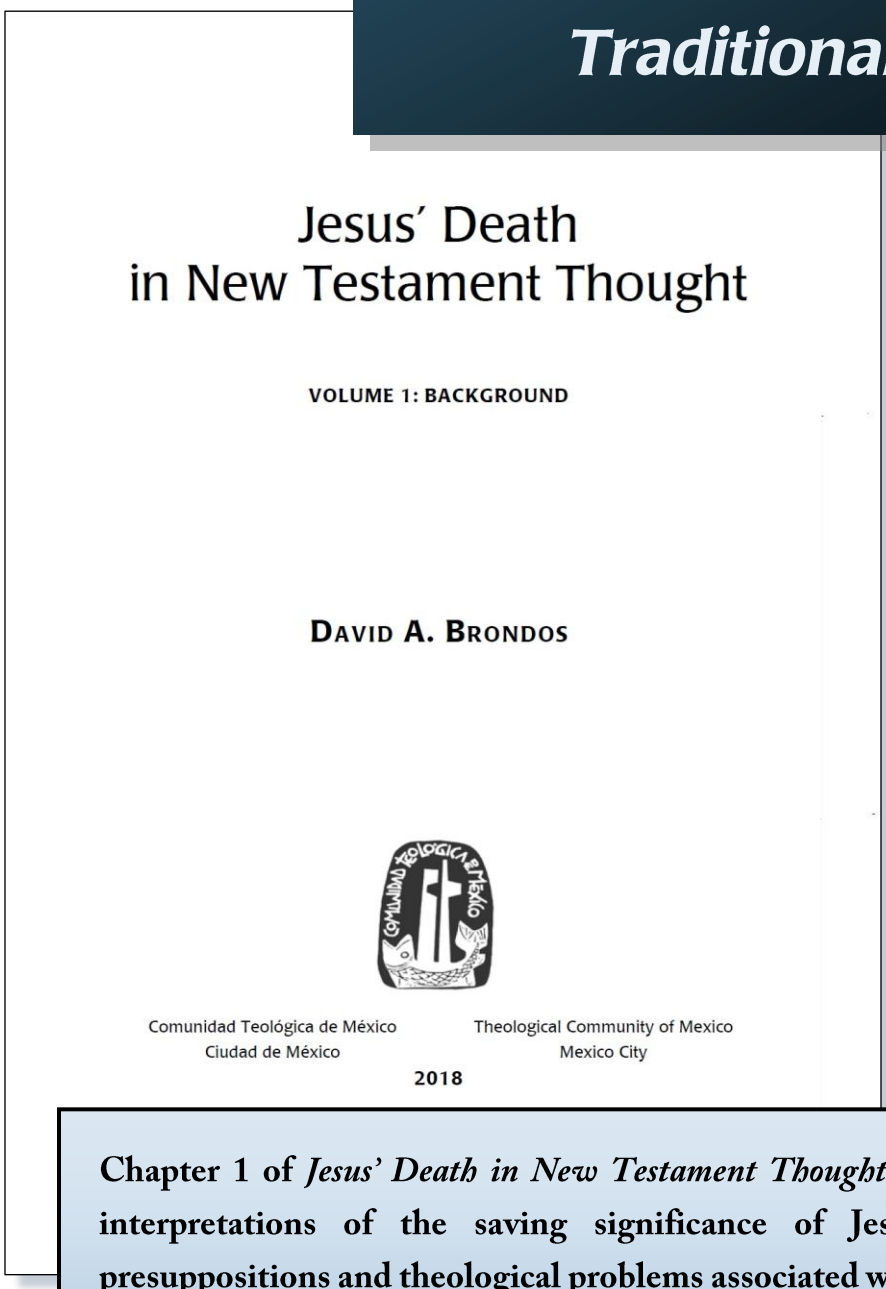

Chapter 1 of *Jesus' Death in New Testament Thought* analyzes the traditional interpretations of the saving significance of Jesus' death, noting the presuppositions and theological problems associated with them. The remainder of the work will argue that the central ideas associated with these traditional interpretations are foreign to biblical and Second Temple Jewish thought and that these ideas have mistakenly been read back into the biblical texts.

CHAPTER 1

Jesus' Death in Traditional Christian Thought

Throughout the various writings of the New Testament, we repeatedly find passages in which salvific significance is ascribed to Jesus' death or blood. In virtually every case, this is done through the use of formulas that are brief and rather enigmatic:

> "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28).
>
> "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28).
>
> "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me".... "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:19-20).
>
> "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).
>
> "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).
>
> "Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son" (Acts 20:28).
>
> They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a means of expiation by his blood (Rom. 3:24-25).
>
> Jesus our Lord... was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:24-25).
>
> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life (Rom. 5:6-10).
>
> Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3).
>
> For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live

> no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them (2 Cor. 5:14-15).
>
> The Lord Jesus Christ... gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age (Gal. 1:4).
>
> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).
>
> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (Eph. 1:7).
>
> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13).
>
> Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Col. 1:20).
>
> For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him (1 Thess. 5:9-10).
>
> For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim. 2:5-6).
>
> He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds (Tit. 2:14).
>
> When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3).
>
> He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself (Heb. 9:26).
>
> You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish (1 Pet. 1:18-19).
>
> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed (1 Pet. 2:24).
>
> The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).
>
> Jesus Christ... loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood (Rev. 1:5).
>
> "You were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).[1]

The fact that these same kinds of formulas appear scattered throughout so many of the New Testament writings suggests not only that Jesus' death was of primary importance for believers in apostolic times, but also that among them it was extremely common to allude to Jesus' death through the use of such formulas. The authors of these writings would hardly have made such frequent use of those formulas in the way that they did unless they anticipated that their readers were well-acquainted with the thought behind them and

1. Many other passages could be added to these; see, for example, John 11:50-52; 12:24; Rom. 8:3-4, 32; 14:9; 1 Cor. 5:7; 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:16; 5:2, 25; Col. 1:22; 2:14; Heb. 2:9; 9:11-14, 28; 10:10, 12, 19; 13:12; 1 Pet. 1:2; 3:18; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Rev. 7:14.

would therefore readily understand them. In many cases, the New Testament writers appear to be citing fixed formulas from an already-established tradition rather than composing such formulas on their own. There can thus be little doubt that the use of such formulas was already widespread in the earliest Christian communities.[2]

Unfortunately, however, none of the writings of the New Testament offer any clear explanation as to how the first believers understood such formulas. The most detailed accounts of Jesus' death that we possess are the passion accounts found in the four canonical Gospels; yet these accounts seem to contain little if any information that might be of help in interpreting the various formulaic allusions to Jesus' death found throughout the New Testament. Outside of Jesus' words over the bread and wine at the Last Supper, which are also formulaic in nature (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20), nowhere in those passion accounts is Jesus' death or blood said to redeem or save anyone, reconcile people to God, propitiate God's wrath, or obtain the remission of sins for others.

For the most part, the writings of the church fathers in the centuries immediately following the apostolic period are also of little help in attempting to discern the original meaning of the formulaic allusions to Jesus' death found in the New Testament. Beginning with the *Peri Pascha* of Melito of Sardis and Irenaeus's work *Against Heresies*, both of which date to the latter half of the second century, we encounter a variety of theological and philosophical ideas that are not readily evident in the New Testament texts, as we shall see in Chapter 18. These ideas were developed further by the church fathers in the following centuries. Undoubtedly, the church fathers often used biblical terms such as *redemption*, *reconciliation*, and *recapitulation* to allude to what had taken place through Christ, yet they tended to interpret these terms in ways that are not fully in continuity with New Testament thought. Even though the New Testament never speaks of the redemption of the human nature in which all people share and its reconciliation and union with the divine nature, this concept became central in patristic teaching. The incarnation of God's Son, the Word or Logos, came to be seen as the primary means by which human nature was joined to the divine, with the result that Jesus' death seemed to become almost of secondary importance. Some of the fathers also argued that God had offered God's Son as a ransom to the devil in order that the devil might release human beings from their bondage to him.

2. In this regard, Helmut Koester argues that Paul must be considered a contemporary of Jesus and that his writings must be regarded as preserving a number of traditional formulae ("The Memory of Jesus' Death and the Worship of the Risen Lord," *HTR* 91 [1998]: 343-44). Koester also affirms that those formulae were "a kind of shorthand reference to a larger context. It is inconceivable that only such formulae existed at the beginning, while larger narrative contexts were developed at a later time" (347). Nevertheless, he adds that among the earliest believers, "the story of Jesus' suffering and death remained fluid for a long time" (350).

Ideas such as these were commonly read back into the New Testament texts, including especially passages that use the type of formulas mentioned above.[3]

The renewed attention given to the biblical texts during the period of the Protestant Reformation led to interpretations of the New Testament allusions to Jesus' death that were very different from those of the church fathers and drew instead on ideas taken from medieval scholars such as Anselm of Canterbury and Peter Abelard. The need to understand the New Testament passages in their original contexts came to be stressed, especially following the rise of biblical scholarship in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet, rather than coming to a consensus on the original meaning of the passages that ascribe salvific significance to Jesus' death, biblical scholars and Christian theologians became polarized over their interpretation. Some affirmed that behind most of these passages was the idea that Christ had saved humanity from death and divine condemnation by undergoing the penalty due to human sin on the cross in the place of guilty sinners, as most of the Reformers had taught. Others, however, argued strongly against such interpretations. Often they claimed instead that Christ's death saves human beings by revealing to them some divine truth, such as the extent of the love of God and Jesus for humanity. Intense debates among scholars over these two interpretations continued well into the twentieth century.

In 1931, the English edition of Gustav Aulén's *Christus Victor* was published. Aulén offered an alternative to these two traditional views that in essence involved a return to patristic thought. He argued that the idea that Christ had triumphed over the forces of evil in his death and resurrection was in fact behind many of the New Testament passages considered above.[4] Subsequently, in 1977, developing the ideas of Rudolf Bultmann and other biblical scholars, E. P. Sanders proposed that the primary idea behind many of the New Testament allusions to Jesus' death was that of *participation in Christ*: one dies with Christ to the power of sin by becoming united to him as a single person.[5] Since then, this proposal has grown considerably in popularity among both biblical scholars and Christian theologians, though the other views mentioned above continue to be maintained as well. Today it has become common to claim that all of these different views can be discerned in the New Testament, though precisely how they are to be combined or reconciled with one another is by no means clear.

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3. See, for example, Gregory of Nyssa's interpretation of Gal. 3:13 in *Against Eunomius* 2.11; 5.5; 12.1, as well as the discussion of the thought of Gregory and Irenaeus of Lyons in David A. Brondos, *Fortress Introduction to Salvation and the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 49-75. See also Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement,* trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: MacMillan, 1969), 16-60.

4. See Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 4-6, 61-80.

5. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 495-514, 519-23, 549, 552. For Rudolf Bultmann's thought regarding participation in Christ, see his *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner, 1951), 1:295-96, 298-99, 302-3, 311-13.

Because of the formulaic nature of the allusions to Jesus' death in the New Testament, those allusions lend themselves to having a wide variety of different ideas read back into them. Phrases such as "Christ died for us," "he gave himself for our sins," "we have been reconciled to God through the death of his Son," "we have redemption through his blood," and "the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin" are so ambiguous, terse, and enigmatic that they can be understood on the basis of practically all of the traditional Christian interpretations of Jesus' death. This means that we cannot take those formulaic allusions themselves as a starting-point for asking how the authors of the New Testament understood Jesus' death to be salvific for others.

Throughout the present work, I will argue that biblical scholars and Christian theologians have wrongly read back into the New Testament texts all of the various ideas just outlined and that such ideas are grounded, not in the thought and worldview of Jesus' first followers, but in later theological and philosophical ideas that are foreign to New Testament thought. Needless to say, this argument involves questioning virtually every aspect of the interpretations given to Jesus' death from the patristic period to the present. To ascribe to the authors of the New Testament writings the views just presented involves ascribing to them as well a series of related ideas, presuppositions, and premises that serve as the basis for those views, along with a variety of problems, inconsistencies, and even contradictions that are inherent to those views.

The purpose of the present chapter is to summarize and analyze the different interpretations given to the New Testament allusions to the salvific nature of Jesus' death, along with the problems that each of these interpretations entails. Unfortunately, because of the wide variety of these interpretations, this chapter will need to be fairly lengthy and, for many readers, perhaps somewhat laborious. Nevertheless, without entering into a careful and detailed analysis of the various interpretations of the New Testament teaching regarding Jesus' death and the ideas associated with those interpretations, it is impossible to address in the following chapters the question of whether they reflect faithfully the New Testament teaching and early Christian thought.

The analysis provided here goes well beyond the type of discussion to which most New Testament scholars are accustomed in their task of interpreting the biblical texts. When considering the New Testament allusions to the salvific nature of Jesus' death, most biblical scholars and interpreters simply repeat the ideas handed down in traditional Christian teaching without ever analyzing carefully those ideas and asking whether they in fact represent the thought of the authors of the New Testament texts. This involves making a series of historical and theological assumptions that are rarely brought out into the open so that they may be scrutinized. Because those interpreters who make these assumptions claim to be presenting not their own thought but the thought of the authors of the New Testament writings, they inevitably attribute to the biblical writers the same assumptions in an uncritical manner.

It is precisely those hidden assumptions that I intend to articulate clearly and examine here.

THE THREE TYPES OF TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS OF CHRIST'S DEATH

In spite of the extremely wide variety of interpretations given to passages such as those cited at the outset of this chapter, as well as the many doctrines or "theories" of atonement that have been put forward to explain the biblical teaching regarding the death of Christ, I would argue that all of the traditional understandings of Christ's work can be classified under three headings: satisfaction, physical, and revelational views or interpretations. However, because the only type of satisfaction view that is commonly attributed to the New Testament writers today is the penal substitution view, I will use this designation to refer to the first of these views. Corresponding to these three understandings of Christ's work are three types of changes that Christ's work is said to bring about in the condition of human beings: forensic, ontological, and ethical.

Satisfaction views of Christ's work became common as a result of the work of Anselm of Canterbury, who completed his influential book *Cur Deus Homo* (*Why God Became Man*) in 1098. According to Anselm, because God's justice made it impossible for God to forgive sins freely, either punishment or satisfaction for human sin was necessary in order for human beings to be saved. Through his passion and death, Christ offered God the satisfaction human beings needed in order to be spared punishment.[6]

Over the next several centuries, Anselm's interpretation of Christ's saving work was modified and eventually came to be replaced by a *penal substitution* interpretation. This was the interpretation adopted by most of the Protestant Reformers. While a penal substitution view also affirms that God's justice was satisfied by Christ's passion and death, it *equates* that satisfaction with the execution of the penalty to which human beings were subject, rather than seeing satisfaction and punishment as *alternatives* in the way that Anselm did. Perhaps the simplest way to explain the difference between the two ideas is to imagine a group of human beings who have incurred such an enormous debt that they have all been sentenced to the death penalty. According to Anselm's view, these human beings are delivered from their plight by someone who satisfies justice by paying that debt in their stead; once the debt is paid, they are no longer subject to any penalty. In contrast, according to a penal substitution view, justice is satisfied by an innocent person coming to endure in the place of those in debt the death penalty to which they were subject. Thus, whereas for Anselm Christ paid humanity's debt but did not endure humanity's penalty, for proponents of penal substitution views Christ satisfied the demands

6. For references and a summary of Anselm's argument in *Cur Deus Homo*, see Brondos, *Fortress Introduction*, 76-87.

of divine justice precisely by enduring the penalty to which all were liable on account of their sins.

In both cases, the result of Christ's work is a change in the *forensic* status of human beings. The plight of human beings is defined in terms of being *guilty of sin* before God or God's law. This makes them subject to divine punishment. Because Christ endured that punishment in their place, they are no longer subject to divine condemnation. Salvation is thus equated with the *remission of sins*. It is important to note that penal substitution views define the relation between sin and human condemnation as well as the relation between Christ's work and human salvation in *extrinsic* terms: in both cases, what is involved is a *divine decision or verdict*. The punishment and salvation of human beings does not follow as a *natural or intrinsic consequence* of their deeds. Rather, ultimately *God* determines personally whether each human being will be punished or saved in accordance with God's justice.

The term *physical* has been applied to the second kind of interpretation of Christ's work to be considered here because it revolves around a particular understanding of human *nature* (*physis* in Greek), as well as the nature of the created order in general. Both human nature and the world in general are viewed as having become subject to sin, which is understood as a *power* that must be overcome rather than as something that simply requires forgiveness. This power tends to be seen either as an impersonal force residing in human nature or else as a personal being such as the devil. In either case, the power may be regarded as exerting influence on human beings from *within* them or from *outside* of them. Other powers, such as corruptibility, death, and at times even God's law are also said to have established their dominion over all human beings as a result of their subjection to the power of sin. Because fallen human beings are incapable of saving themselves from these powers, Christ must save them by healing and transforming the nature in which he comes to share with them and with the created order by means of his incarnation. However, it is not only Christ's incarnation but also his life, death, and resurrection that are viewed as bringing about this healing and transformation of human nature and nature in general.

In contrast to a forensic view, here there is an *intrinsic* relation between sin and its consequences. The power of sin in human nature leads *in and of itself* to negative consequences such as corruptibility and death. These consequences are therefore due, not to any type of direct divine intervention or divine judgment, but to a natural cause-and-effect process.

According to a physical understanding of Christ's work, Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection effect an *ontological* change in human beings, that is, a change in their *being*. Because it is God alone who effects this change by sending Christ into human nature, human beings are seen as initially playing only a *passive role* in the deliverance of their fallen nature from sin's power. Nevertheless, once that deliverance has taken place, it must still become a full reality in them by means of their faith.

The third understanding of Christ's saving work to be considered here defines it in terms of *revealing* to human beings what is necessary in order for them to be saved. This revelation may be directed at their *mind* or *understanding* as well as their *heart* or *will*. According to the first of these two ideas, Christ's life, death, and resurrection provide human beings with the *knowledge* they need to be saved. According to the second, the love of God manifested in these events *inspires* and *motivates* human beings to live differently. In both cases, as a result of the revelation they receive through Christ, they are brought to put away their sinful behavior and live in accordance with God's will. Because what God has done in Christ is salvific through the "moral influence" it exerts on human beings, that phrase is often used as a label for this type of view of Christ's work.

The change brought about in human beings according to a revelational understanding of Christ's work is therefore an *ethical* change. Whereas forensic views posit first and foremost a salvation from the *guilt* of sin and ontological views speak of a salvation from the *power* of sin, ethical views define salvation in terms of being delivered from sinful *behavior* and *actions* that are contrary to God's will. As their way of thinking is transformed by the revelation they receive through Christ and his life and death, believers are enabled to amend their conduct. In this case, human beings play an *active* role in the change that occurs in them by responding to what Christ has done. This difference sets this view apart from both the forensic and ontological views, where human beings receive passively the change in status or transformation of their being that is effected by Christ.

Both the *Christus Victor* idea and the participatory understandings of Christ's work inevitably take the form of one of the three views just mentioned. The *Christus Victor* idea can be understood in terms of Christ making *satisfaction* to the devil so that *forensically* human beings are no longer liable to sin and death, in terms of Christ defeating evil or the devil *physically* so that *ontologically* human beings are delivered from the powers of sin and death, or in terms of Christ *revealing* to human beings how they can overcome sin, death, and the devil by altering their behavior *ethically*. Similarly, participatory views of Christ's work define the notion of participation in *forensic*, *ontological*, or *ethical* terms, as we shall see below. This means that the *Christus Victor* and participatory interpretations of Christ's work are not *alternatives* to the three views already mentioned, as is often claimed, but are actually different forms or expressions of these same views.

Corresponding to the three distinct definitions of sin as guilt, as a power, and as conduct contrary to God's will are three distinct manners of understanding the nature of salvation. *Forensic* views tend to define salvation primarily in *other-worldly* terms: God's decision to remit sins enables believers to be received into God's presence in the life to come, even though to some extent they enjoy a reconciled relationship to God in this life as well. *Ontological* views speak of a process of transformation that begins in this life

but is completed and perfected after death. *Ethical* views tend to see salvation as something that takes place primarily in the *present* world as people come to live and act differently, though that ethical change also constitutes the basis upon which they attain salvation in the afterlife or the world to come.

Although each understanding of Christ's work is associated with a different type of change in human beings or their situation, these different types of change may also be seen as resulting from something *other* than Christ's coming, life, death, and resurrection. In fact, virtually every Christian soteriology combines the three in some way. The *forensic standing* of human beings before God may be attributed to the ontological change that has taken place in them or to their new life of obedience rather than to what Christ did in his death: their sins are forgiven on account of the new nature they receive or the change in their conduct brought about by the revelation given to them. An *ontological* transformation may be seen as the result of something such as the work of the Holy Spirit or the reception of the sacraments rather than Christ's incarnation, life, death, and resurrection per se. The *ethical* change taking place in believers may be ascribed primarily, not to the revelation they have received, but to the change that Christ's death has brought about in their forensic standing before God or the ontological transformation that has taken place in them. It is also common to claim that those who have obtained forgiveness by means of Christ's death must nevertheless come to live a life of obedience to God in order to continue to receive the forgiveness of their sins. In this case, while initially the forensic status of believers depends on Christ's death, they can only retain that status by means of ethical behavior that is in accordance with God's will.

All of these views make any change in human beings or their condition dependent upon God's grace, yet in each view this grace is understood differently. This is true both with regard to the way Christ's work is understood and with regard to the way salvation is defined. A penal substitution view sees God's grace manifested in God's sending Christ to undergo the punishment for human sin in the stead of sinful human beings and on that basis delivering them from condemnation. According to a physical interpretation of Christ's work, God's grace takes the form of sending God's Son into the world so that the human nature in which all people share can be transformed by virtue of its union with the divine nature. A revelational view, of course, sees God's grace in terms of the revelation that God provides.

On this basis, according to a forensic view of salvation, God's grace is understood as a *favorable disposition* toward human beings. An ontological understanding of grace conceives of God's grace as a *power* transmitted to human beings in some way. This divine power, which is often identified with the Holy Spirit, transforms those who receive it. In an ethical view, grace is understood in terms of God's providing human beings with the *knowledge* or *inspiration* they need in order to amend their conduct.

In order to address the question of the extent to which these various views of Christ's work reflect faithfully New Testament thought, it is important to examine the premises, suppositions, and foundations on which each view rests. This analysis will provide us with the basis necessary to consider in Chapters 2–4 whether there is any evidence that the ideas that form the basis for each of these different views were in existence in the first century CE and therefore might have influenced the way in which Jesus' first followers came to understand the significance of his death.

PENAL SUBSTITUTION INTERPRETATIONS OF CHRIST'S WORK IN NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

From the time of the Protestant Reformation to the present, biblical scholars have commonly interpreted New Testament passages such as those cited at the outset of this chapter on the basis of the idea of penal substitution. In fact, this interpretation has become so firmly entrenched in biblical scholarship that even those who have expressed a strong aversion to the notion of penal substitution have felt compelled to recognize that it is indeed present in the New Testament writings, most notably those that bear Paul's name.[7]

Undoubtedly, it would be an oversimplification to affirm that biblical scholars who interpret the New Testament allusions to Christ's death on the basis of the idea of penal substitution agree fully as to precisely how penal substitution should be understood. Nevertheless, in spite of the differences among them with regard to certain details or the interpretation of particular passages, a number of basic ideas are commonly repeated by the majority of these scholars. Even when they do not mention many of these basic ideas explicitly, the reason for this seems to be that it has become so axiomatic that these ideas represent faithfully New Testament thought that those commenting on passages that allude to Christ's death generally see no need to offer any type of substantive argument in favor of the claim that these ideas are actually present in those passages.

The central tenet of penal substitution interpretations is that the penalty to which human beings were liable because of their sins was endured by Christ on the cross, with the result that human beings are no longer subject to that penalty. Thus, for example, Leon Morris, one of the most ardent defenders of this type of view, claims that in numerous passages Paul clearly teaches that "Christ has borne the penalty for our sins. And because he has borne the

7. The liberal Protestant theologian Hastings Rashdall, for example, strongly rejected the penal substitution view, yet felt compelled to admit: "It is impossible to get rid of this idea of substitution or vicarious punishment, from any faithful representation of Paul's doctrine" (*The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*; London: Macmillan, 1920, 92). Similarly, biblical scholars such as D. E. H. Whiteley and Sanders, who wish to replace a penal substitutionary interpretation of many Pauline passages with a participatory one, feel forced to acknowledge that the juristic idea is not totally absent from Paul's writings; according to Whiteley, in Paul's letters there are "passages in which the possibility of substitutionary thought cannot be excluded" (*The Theology of St. Paul*, rev. ed.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974, 130; see also Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 500-503).

penalty we no longer face it. It is taken out of the way."[8] Similarly, George Eldon Ladd attributes to Paul the notion that "Christ suffered the penalty and judgment of God in the stead of the sinner by virtue of which the sinner will never experience that awful penalty.... God visited upon sin its just doom and penalty in him who is not only the sinner's representative but also his or her substitute, Jesus Christ."[9]

This same basic idea is expressed in terms of Christ having endured the *judgment* or *condemnation* that sinners deserved for their sin. For this reason, this understanding of Christ's work is often referred to as "juridical" or "juristic." New Testament scholars commonly ascribe to Paul, for example, ideas such as that "through his own death, [Christ] has taken the judgment of death and condemnation upon himself, thereby liberating humanity from this judgment," and that, "in so dying, Christ submitted to a judgment that God passed in Christ's death upon all humanity, all whom Christ represented."[10] For this reason, human beings "are no longer subject to the judgment he has borne for them."[11] At times, it is even affirmed that in Paul's thought the judgment Christ endured was the eschatological judgment: "the final judgment of God has become manifest in his death.... Christ's death was a demonstration of God's righteous judgment on the sin of the world.... In Christ's death God has sat in judgment, has judged sin, and in this way he has caused his eschatological judgment to be revealed in the present time."[12] "The crucifixion should therefore be understood as a prolepsis of the eschatological judgment of God. He delivered and condemned Christ, instead of the ungodly, instead of all."[13] While the verdict of condemnation was pronounced upon the innocent Christ, the verdict of acquittal was consequently pronounced upon human beings, who are therefore declared righteous or justified: "this acquittal, justification, which consists of the divine absolution of sin, has already been effected by the death of Christ and may be received by faith here and now."[14]

Paul's affirmation in Gal. 3:13 that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" has commonly been regarded as one of the clearest statements of the penal substitution idea in the New Testament. Ronald Fung claims that this verse "represents Christ's death as a vicarious

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8. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 243.

9. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 468, 470.

10. Arland J. Hultgren, *Christ and his Benefits: Christology and Redemption in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 54; cf. 51; A. J. M. Wedderburn, "2 Corinthians 5:14—A Key to Paul's Soteriology?," in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict. Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall* (ed. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott; NovTSup 109; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 282.

11. Morris, *Cross*, 230.

12. Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 167-68. Cf. Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 259-60.

13. Cilliers Breytenbach, "The 'For Us' Phrases in Pauline Soteriology: Considering Their Background and Use," in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology* (ed. Jan G. van der Watt; NovTSup 121; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 180.

14. Ladd, *Theology*, 484.

bearing of the curse of the law which delivers his people from the same curse."[15] According to Bradley McLean, "God transferred this curse from humanity to a substitutionary victim, Christ.... The curse borne by Christ (3.13) is the same curse previously borne by Christians before their baptism...."[16] Often this is understood in terms of a transaction between God and Christ: "Gal. 3.13 states that Christ offered his own life as payment for (in exchange for) the lives of Christians who were slaves to the law. This commercial metaphor explains how Christians are freed from the curse at the cost of Christ's life which was given in exchange."[17] The New Testament passages that speak of Christ bearing the sins of others (Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24) have also generally been interpreted on the basis of these ideas. It is said that Christ assumed not only the *penalty* for human sin but human sin or guilt itself. This may be described either in terms of imputation, which involves the sin of others being reckoned or accounted to Christ, or in terms of some type of actual transmission or transfer of human sin from sinners onto Christ in his death, as if it constituted some type of concentrated substance.[18]

All of these ideas can be understood in two different ways. When the relationship between sin and death is regarded as *extrinsic*, death is seen as a punishment that God inflicts personally and directly on those who sin. According to a penal substitution interpretation, God elects to deliver sinful human beings from the punishment of death that their sins deserve by inflicting that punishment instead on the innocent Christ as their substitute. However, death can also be understood as an *intrinsic* consequence of sin. In this case, human sin leads to death naturally, independently of any personal and direct intervention by God. Undoubtedly, it can be argued that God originally played a role in establishing an intrinsic relationship between sin and death when God created the world in such a way that sin would lead naturally to death. However, when people now die as a result of their sin, God is not seen as intervening personally to bring about their death. The notion of *penalty* is usually understood in terms of an *extrinsic* relationship, whereas the word *consequence* is generally used to refer to an *intrinsic* relationship between a deed and its result. Human salvation can therefore be seen as resulting from Christ's substitutionary death either *extrinsically* or *intrinsically*.

This distinction becomes fundamental when Christ is said to have endured God's wrath in the place of sinful human beings. Generally, to speak of God's wrath is to refer to a personal trait of God, who responds to human sin by inflicting punishment directly on human beings or on Christ as their substitute. Among some New Testament scholars, however, it is common to see

15. Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 150.

16. B. Hudson McLean, *The Cursed Christ: Mediterranean Expulsion Rituals and Pauline Soteriology* (JSNTSup 126; Sheffield: JSOT, 1996), 124-25.

17. Ibid., 131.

18. See, for example, Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 1:444; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 318; McLean, *Cursed Christ*, 205.

God's wrath in impersonal terms as a force that acts on its own through some type of cause-and-effect relationship. On that basis, it is commonly said that Christ's death "exhausted" God's wrath at sin. Death can also be understood as a "judgment" that is a natural consequence of sin, rather than a judgment dictated by God personally. Strictly speaking, such views do not understand Christ's death in terms of penal substitution. Rather, they must be classified as *physical* views of Christ's work, since they present Christ's death as effecting human salvation through the intrinsic and natural consequences that it has on human nature. These views will therefore be considered in the next section.

In reality, many proponents of penal substitution interpretations alternate between these two views. The reason for this is that when an *extrinsic* view between Christ's death and human salvation is maintained, God must be said to have poured out God's wrath *personally* on Christ and even to have condemned or cursed Christ. As feminist theologians have argued, such a view of Christ's death seems to portray God as a "divine child abuser" who inflicts punishment on Christ directly.[19] Many biblical scholars therefore prefer to speak of Christ enduring the punishment or curse dictated by God's *law* or God's *justice* rather than by God personally. Stephen Westerholm, for example, affirms that "Christ, in his crucifixion, was himself the object of the law's curse.... thereby he exhausted its force for those otherwise cursed who believe in him. (Indeed, the curse that the law pronounces on transgressors is hardly to be distinguished from the divine condemnation that looms over all who fall short of God's required righteousness—a condemnation that can also be said to have been absorbed by Christ's death.)."[20] According to Westerholm, Christ endured the judgment to which people of all times and places were subject, even those who lived in the centuries before Christ: "far from overlooking human wrongdoing, God had merely postponed its decisive condemnation until it could be channeled onto the crucified Christ rather than onto the wrongdoers themselves."[21] Here it is *God's law* that cursed Christ, with the result that its "force" was "exhausted" when Christ "absorbed" its condemnation in his death; the condemnation to which wrongdoers were subject was "channeled" onto Christ when he died. These terms all imply natural "cause-and-effect" processes in which God does not seem to intervene personally.

While affirmations such as these apparently make it possible for proponents of penal substitution views to avoid portraying God as a violent parent or harsh judge whose wrath at human sin is placated only when God has poured out that wrath on God's innocent Son, they raise a different problem: God's law and God's justice are conceived of as personal agents, as if they had a mind and a will of their own and acted independently of God. This

19. See Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?," in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (ed. Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn; New York: Pilgrim, 1989), 23.

20. Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and his Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 376.

21. Ibid., 284.

makes the relationship between Christ's death and salvation an intrinsic one and removes God from the equation. For this reason, proponents of penal substitution views tend to jump back and forth between the extrinsic and intrinsic understandings of Christ's death, seeking to avoid presenting God as the one who personally cursed and condemned Christ while at the same time attempting to avoid the notion that God's law and God's justice law function on their own, independently of God.

Nevertheless, since the biblical writings frequently speak of God's wrath at human sin, many biblical scholars insist that one must not shy away from affirming that God poured out God's righteous wrath at sin on Christ in the place of sinners, no matter how objectionable that affirmation may sound. For these scholars, to deny this idea is to deny a clear teaching of the New Testament. Ladd, for example, insists: "In his identification with sinful humankind, [Christ] is the object of the holy wrath of God against sin, and in Gethsemane as the hour of the passion approaches the full horror of that wrath is disclosed.... We may therefore conclude, even though the Scriptures nowhere use this terminology, that Christ in his death in a real sense of the word experienced the wrath of God in the place of the guilty sinner."[22] Similarly, Ben Witherington III claims that in Paul's thought "God's anger is a righteous indignation against sin" in order to claim: "This wrath is poured out on Christ in the place of sinners."[23] In his death, Christ placated God's wrath: "the cross was the place where God expressed divine wrath against sin and was propitiated."[24] According to Witherington, this idea derives from Jesus himself: "Jesus saw his task in life to come and die, enduring God's overwhelming wrath."[25] It is also common among biblical scholars to speak of God's righteous wrath in terms of God's enmity or hostility toward sin or sinners, which is said to have come to an end when Christ endured it on the cross.[26]

According to penal substitution views, by delivering human beings from the penalty, condemnation, or curse to which they were previously subject, Christ has reconciled them to God, since God no longer holds anything against them.[27] Those who come to faith are also justified or acquitted on the basis of Christ's death in the sense that God declares them righteous.

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22. Ladd, *Theology*, 191, 473. See also Simon J. Gathercole, who argues extensively for this idea ("Justified by Faith, Justified by his Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21—4:25," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, Vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul*; ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; WUNT 2/181; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 169-81).

23. Witherington, *Paul's Narrative*, 161. See also Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 141-44; Gathercole, "Justified," 168-81.

24. Witherington, *Paul's Narrative*, 164.

25. Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 124.

26. See, for example, Morris, *Cross*, 250, 405, 415; Werner G. Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament according to its Major Witnesses: Jesus–Paul–John*, trans. John E. Steely (London: SCM, 1974), 204.

27. Simon Gathercole, for example, claims that in the New Testament, and particularly Paul's epistles, "there is actually very good evidence for seeing substitutionary atonement as intrinsic to the biblical presentation of how God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ" (*Defending Substitution: An Essay on Atonement in Paul*; ASBT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015, 28).

Nevertheless, this righteousness involves a *forensic status* before God rather than any type of actual or ethical righteousness on the part of believers.

Although views of Christ's work that are based on the notion of participation are often regarded as representing an alternative to penal substitution or juridical views, in reality participation in Christ and his death can also be understood forensically. In this case, all are said to have participated in Christ's death or to have died with Christ in the sense that "all are, juridically, regarded by God as having died. This would mean that, whilst Christ alone in actuality suffered the penalty for sin, all are regarded *as though* they had suffered it themselves."[28] C. E. B. Cranfield interprets Romans 6 in the sense that believers "died with Christ in God's decision" or "in God's sight."[29] "God's decision to take our sins upon himself in the person of his dear Son was tantamount to a decision to see us as having died in Christ's death."[30] According to a purely forensic understanding of participation, believers do not die with Christ in a real, ontological sense, nor do they simply identify ethically with his death. Rather, they are merely viewed by God *as if* they had undergone the penalty of death they deserved, even though in actuality they have *not* done so.

A number of German scholars have attempted to bring the ideas of substitution and participation together by speaking of two types of *Stellvertretung*, which can roughly be translated "place-taking": an "exclusive" place-taking (*excludierende* or *ausschließende Stellvertretung*) and an "inclusive" place-taking (*inkludierende* or *einschließende Stellvertretung*).[31] According to this latter idea, Christ and sinners become one so that the death of Christ is the death of the sinner as well. The notion of penal substitution, however, corresponds more closely to the "exclusive" place-taking, since in his death Christ is said to occupy "exclusively" a place that sinful human beings do *not* occupy together with him.

The *Christus Victor* idea, which like the participatory interpretations of Christ's death is often seen as an alternative to penal substitution views, also exists in a forensic form. It is said that, when human beings sinned, the devil acquired juridical or legal *rights* over them. In this way, humanity fell under the devil's power and became subject to death. The devil lost his rights over human beings, however, when he took Christ's life. According to one version of the forensic *Christus Victor* idea, the devil acted unjustly by having the

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28. Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 1:410, referring to the teaching of Hans Lietzmann and F. F. Bruce. Douglas J. Moo speaks explicitly of a "forensic" union with Christ and rejects the notion that Paul understood this union ontologically (*The Epistle to the Romans*; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, 395). See also Ladd, *Theology*, 468-69; A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against its Graeco-Roman Background* (WUNT 44; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 351.

29. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed. (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 1:311.

30. Ibid., 1:316.

31. See Otfried Hofius, *Paulusstudien* (WUNT 51; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989), 33-49. Hofius credits Harmut Gese for this distinction. For an English summary of this distinction and references from the works of German scholars, see Daniel P. Bailey, "Concepts of *Stellvertretung* in the Interpretation of Isaiah 53," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (ed. William H. Bellinger Jr. and William R. Farmer; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 236-50.

innocent Christ put to death, and therefore God was no longer under any obligation to respect the devil's rights over human beings.[32] According to a second version, however, either God or Christ himself offered Christ's life to the devil as a ransom payment in exchange for the release of the human beings under the devil's power. When the devil accepted the ransom payment, he ceded his rights over human beings, but subsequently the devil lost all when Christ rose from the dead by virtue of his divine power.[33] In both cases, if the "penalty" to which human beings were legally subjected on account of their sin is defined in terms of coming under the power of death and the devil, then by enduring this same penalty as their substitute, Christ has freed human beings from this penalty.

Few biblical scholars today would claim that this forensic *Christus Victor* understanding of Christ's work is present in the New Testament. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, it is common for scholars to affirm that God's *law* obtained rights over human beings when they fell into sin. Often it is argued that Paul conceived of the law as a personified power. According to this idea, once the law unjustly condemned Christ to death, it lost its right to condemn sinful human beings. In this way, they are delivered from the law's condemnation. Because this law is said to have been given by God, such an understanding of Christ's work is not an *alternative* to the penal substitution view but another *expression* of it: as *Christus Victor*, Christ overcomes the power of God's law to condemn sinful human beings by taking that condemnation upon himself as their substitute, thereby making the law forfeit the rights it had over them.[34]

Proponents of penal substitution interpretations often use language that is more frequently associated with other views of Christ's work, yet they nevertheless understand that language differently. They may speak of a "new humanity," yet by this they mean not some type of ontologically-transformed human nature but a humanity that is no longer under the penalty of death. Paul's allusion to a "new creation" can also be taken to refer to the new forensic standing that belongs to believers, who are now free from the penalty of death thanks to Christ. Some scholars also attribute to Paul the idea that Christ's death brought about the "turn of the ages" or "ushered in a new age," which has now "dawned," yet this language can likewise be seen as referring simply to a new situation in which human beings are no longer under the condemnation dictated by God's law.[35]

The affirmation that those who have been freed from the punishment due to their sins on account of Christ's substitutionary death is also commonly combined with the claim that they have been freed from the *power* of

32. See Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 50-51.

33. See ibid., 49, 52-53.

34. See, for example, Hultgren, *Christ*, 98: "The law can no longer accuse, for trespasses brought to light by the law have been given their due in the atoning death of Jesus."

35. See, for example, Hultgren, *Christ*, 54; Witherington, *Paul's Narrative*, 143, 149; Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (NFTL; Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 103.

sin. Ladd, for example, writes: "By the death of Christ the believer finds not only an objective atonement for sin; she or he finds also deliverance from the power of sin and the domination and bondage of the Law and of the world."[36] Similarly, Gordon Fee claims that for Paul the death of Christ "for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3) "almost certainly includes not only forgiveness of past sins, but in a very real sense deliverance from the bondage of one's sinfulness as well."[37] In this case, however, the power of sin is understood as the burden of bearing divine condemnation for one's sins. The knowledge that one is under God's judgment supposedly drives one to despair of one's salvation and to fall more deeply into sin. However, once a person has attained assurance of forgiveness and salvation, that person no longer feels burdened by sin, fear, and guilt and becomes free to live differently.

Penal substitution views also exist in what can be labeled a "historicized" form. Since the time of Albert Schweitzer, a number of biblical scholars (including especially Dale Allison, N. T. Wright, and Brant Pitre) have affirmed that Jesus understood his death in terms of enduring the so-called messianic woes or messianic tribulation in the place of his disciples.[38] In Wright's thought, the traditional notion of divine punishment is replaced with that of *exile*. This represents a historicized understanding of the plight of sinful human beings: "Forgiveness of sins is another way of saying return from exile," which was viewed by the prophets of Israel "precisely as the result of, or the punishment for, her sins." Thus, if "Israel were to be brought back from exile, this would mean that her sins were being punished no more; in other words, forgiven."[39]

According to Wright, Jesus delivered others from the punishment coming upon them by going to Jerusalem in order to undergo that punishment himself on the cross: "Jesus was now going ahead of the nation to undergo the punishment which above all symbolized the judgment of Rome on her rebel subjects.... Jesus believed he would suffer the fate that was hanging over Jerusalem; indeed, he desired to take it upon himself so that she might avoid it."[40] This involved enduring God's wrath in the place of others in a historical sense: "Jesus therefore not only took upon himself the 'wrath' (which, as usual in Jewish thought, refers to hostile military action) which was coming upon Israel because she had compromised with paganism and was suffering exile. He also took upon himself the 'wrath' which was coming upon Israel because she had refused his way of peace."[41] Wright readily affirms his agreement with

36. Ladd, *Theology*, 470.

37. Gordon D. Fee, "Toward a Theology of 1 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology*, Vol. 2: *1 and 2 Corinthians* (ed. David M. Hay; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 49. See also Morris, *Cross*, 299, 301.

38. For a summary of the views of Schweitzer and other biblical scholars on this subject, see Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of the Atonement* (WUNT 2/204; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 8-23.

39. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 268 (emphasis removed).

40. Ibid., 570-71.

41. Ibid., 596 (emphasis removed).

Schweitzer on these points: "Schweitzer was right: Jesus believed that the messianic woes were about to burst upon Israel, and that he had to take them upon himself, solo."[42]

Elsewhere, Wright argues that Paul later developed these same ideas further. According to Wright, in his letter to the Romans, Paul affirms that Christ's death had delivered not only Israel but humanity as a whole from divine punishment:

> The *katakrima* [condemnation] which hung over the head of Adamic humanity (5.16) has been meted out on the real culprit, namely, sin (7.17, 20). It is therefore true to Paul to speak of the punishment which all have deserved being enacted, instead, on the cross.... [Paul] is careful to say that on the cross God punished (not Jesus, but) sin.... [T]he death of Jesus can be interpreted in this way because he represents Israel and Israel represents humankind as a whole.[43]

For Paul, "Christ, as the representative Messiah, has achieved a specific task, that of taking on himself the curse which hung over Israel.... [T]he Messiah, as Israel's representative, allows the full weight of [sin] to fall on himself."[44]

Of course, scholars who defend the claim that the notion of penal substitution is behind much of the New Testament's language regarding Jesus' death must explain how this idea came to be characteristic of the thought of Paul and the other New Testament writers. To do this, such scholars have looked not only to passages from the Hebrew Scriptures but also to Jewish and Hellenistic writings of the second-temple period in order to argue that the basis for the notion of penal substitution is found there. Among the most important of these passages are Isaiah 53 and the accounts of the deaths of the Maccabean martyrs in 2 and 4 Maccabees, which are thought to affirm the atoning efficacy of the death of a righteous person on behalf of others. Many scholars claim that this same idea is present in the rabbinic writings as well. Proponents of penal substitution views also generally claim that in ancient Jewish thought, when those who had sinned presented animal victims as a sacrifice for their sins, those animal victims were enduring the punishment or penalty that the sinners deserved in their place, thereby liberating sinners from that punishment or penalty.

Theological Problems and Presuppositions

Penal substitution interpretations of Christ's work are based on a number of theological and philosophical premises, some of which are highly problematic

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42. Ibid., 609.

43. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 213. Here Wright is commenting on Rom. 8:3. It is not entirely clear how Wright can claim that, on the cross, God was punishing sin rather than Jesus, since all of the suffering there was endured by Jesus rather than by sin independently of Jesus.

44. Wright, *Climax*, 151-52. Because the difficulties raised by this "historicized" version of the penal substitution view are of a somewhat different nature than those associated with the more traditional interpretations of Jesus' death as substitutionary, I will analyze it further in Chapter 5 rather than in the present chapter.

from a theological standpoint. For this reason, to ascribe such ideas to Paul and other authors of the New Testament writings necessarily involves ascribing to them these theological and philosophical premises as well as the theological problems associated with them. Furthermore, if Paul and the other New Testament writers interpreted Jesus' death on the basis of ideas taken from Jewish or Hellenistic sources, then some of the same basic premises must be found there as well. All of this makes it important to look closely at these premises in order to analyze the theological and historical problems each one raises.

Premise 1: God's justice must be satisfied before God can remit sins.

This is the most fundamental premise inherent to penal substitution views of Christ's work. It was central to the argument of Anselm, who claimed that it would be a mockery of God's justice for God to show mercy and freely forgive sin without demanding either punishment or satisfaction: "for this kind of divine mercy is utterly contrary to God's justice, which allows only for punishment to be requited for sin. Therefore, as it is impossible for God to be at odds with himself, so it is impossible for him to be merciful in this way."[45]

This same claim that free forgiveness of sin is impossible for God because it conflicts with God's justice and God's holy nature is found in the writings of biblical scholars who advocate penal substitution views. Cranfield, for example, argues that "for God simply to pass over sins would be altogether incompatible with his righteousness. He would not be the good and merciful God had he been content to pass over sins indefinitely; for this would have been to condone evil—a denial of his own nature and a cruel betrayal of sinners."[46] Similarly, Simon Gathercole finds in Rom. 3:21-26 the idea of "God's infallible punishment of sin.... [I]t is a Pauline presupposition that sin(s) must be punished."[47] According to I. H. Marshall, "Somehow God has to act in such a way that his justice is upheld (Rom. 3:26). This is achieved by Christ's death which enables God to pardon sinners while upholding justice."[48] Christ "has done representatively what was needed for sinful humanity so as to uphold the holiness and righteousness of God."[49] Ladd attributes to Paul the idea that "it is an ethical and religious necessity that the holiness of God manifest itself in wrath against sin."[50]

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45. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1.24. Quotations taken from Vol. 3 of *Anselm of Canterbury* (trans. and ed. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson; Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1976).

46. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:211-12 (emphasis removed).

47. Gathercole, "Justified," 168-69. For similar affirmations, see Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 2nd ed. (WUNT 29; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 60, referring to the thought of Peter Bläser and Albrecht Oepke; Ladd, *Theology*, 472-73; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology*, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 55; Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 278.

48. I. Howard Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity* (London: Paternoster, 2007), 38.

49. Ibid., 97.

50. Ladd, *Theology*, 495.

This premise is indispensable to penal substitution views. If God *could* forgive sins freely, then it would not have been necessary for God to send God's Son into the world to die, and Christ's death would then have had no real salvific purpose. Nevertheless, the idea that God could not forgive sins without Christ's death is problematic in that it makes God subject to a certain understanding of God's law, God's nature, or God's justice, so that God is *under obligation* to act in a certain way in relation to sin. In other words, there is something that by nature is *impossible* for God to do, namely, overlook sin without punishing it. Naturally, scholars defending penal substitution views deny that any problem exists in this regard. Morris, for example, affirms that "the eternal law of righteousness cannot be allowed to suffer disrepute" and speaks of "the inflexible law which is at the very basis of the being of God,"[51] yet insists: "It is an error to think of law as something set over God and to which he is in subjection. But, since law 'is in harmony with his very being' he will act in harmony with the highest law."[52] Such an affirmation hardly resolves the problem, however. Even if this law is said to be that of God's very being, it is still something to which God must be subject and which God is obliged to obey.

Penal substitution views of Christ's work imply that God's law must remain inviolate for *God's* sake: God must punish sin to respond to an *inner need* on God's part. If God did not satisfy the "law of his very being," God would cease not only to be holy and righteous but to be God. Often, however, it is argued instead that God cannot let sins remain unpunished *for the sake of human beings*. This was Anselm's argument: if God did not punish sins, then the order and beauty of the universe would be disturbed, since human beings would commit all kinds of injustice, knowing that they would not be punished.[53] Biblical scholars make the same claim today. Commenting on Rom. 3:25-26, C. K. Barrett writes: "Because of the past God must now vindicate his righteousness, which otherwise would be impugned. Men might say, God does not care about sin; anyone may sin as much as he pleases and get away with it."[54] Similarly, commenting on the same passage, Cranfield affirms: "For God to have forgiven men's sins lightly—a cheap forgiveness which would have implied that moral evil does not matter very much—would have been altogether unrighteous, a violation of his truth and profoundly unmerciful and unloving toward men, since it would have annihilated their dignity as persons morally accountable."[55] According to Stephen Travis, "God's patient holding back of his wrath might have been interpreted to mean that he was indifferent to human sins—which would be a denial of his own nature."[56]

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51. Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 279, 295-96.

52. Morris, *Cross*, 383, n48 (reacting to a quote from Albrecht Ritschl).

53. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1.12, 15.

54. C. K. Barrett, *Paul: An Introduction to his Thought* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 101.

55. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:213-14. For similar affirmations, see G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (ed. and comp. L. D. Hurst; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 146; Ladd, *Theology*, 473.

56. Stephen H. Travis, "Christ as Bearer of Divine Judgment in Paul's Thought about the Atonement," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 339.

According to scholars such as these, God cannot let sin go unpunished *for the good of human beings themselves*, since to forgive sins freely would involve giving human beings a license to sin. This idea, however, is problematic on a couple of accounts. First, it implies that God's ultimate aim in demanding that human beings avoid sin and threatening them with punishment if they disobey is that justice and well-being may prevail among them. In this case, God must punish sin in order to dissuade or prevent human beings from practicing it. Experience would indicate, however, that under certain circumstances one may let sin or wrongdoing go unpunished and still accomplish that objective. For example, a judge may decide to suspend or revoke the sentence that has been imposed on a person guilty of a misdemeanor if the judge is convinced that the person is sufficiently remorseful of his or her action and is unlikely to violate the law again in the future. This is not considered unjust on the part of the judge, since the objective is not to satisfy the demands of the law, but to do what contributes most to the good of society, as well as the good of offenders themselves and others affected by the judge's decision.

For the same reasons, if God's true concern in punishing sin were human well-being, then there are circumstances under which God might leave sin *un*punished. By refusing to allow for this possibility, however, and instead insisting that God *must* punish sin because by nature God *cannot* forgive freely, biblical scholars who defend the notion of penal substitution in effect maintain that God's ultimate concern is not for human beings but for God's own nature. The absolute need for punishment is therefore due to the impossibility that God might act contrary to God's perfectly holy and righteous nature and not to a concern on God's part that failing to punish sin might result in human beings taking sin lightly. This means that ultimately God must punish sin and satisfy the demands of God's nature, not for the sake of human beings, but *for God's own sake*.

A second problem, however, is that if Christ is said to have endured the punishment of all human beings collectively in their place, with the result that they are no longer under threat of punishment or condemnation, then God ends up doing precisely what God wanted to avoid in the first place: sinners can sin freely and practice all the injustice they want because they know that they will not be punished now that Christ has undergone their punishment in their place. In this case, thanks to Christ's substitutionary death, they *can* now say confidently, "God no longer cares about sin; anyone may sin as much as he pleases and get away with it," to use Barrett's words.

To argue on the contrary that those who have been saved must still practice obedience to God if they want to avoid divine punishment would require denying that Christ endured in their place the punishment for *all* of their sins. This involves what is often called "double justification": whereas the initial forgiveness believers receive depends on Christ's death, any subsequent forgiveness depends on their ethical behavior. This idea is clearly implied in Morris's affirmation: "There is a divine wrath against every evil thing and

when that has been put away by what Christ did we must have a due horror of arousing it again."[57] Here it is clear that, if one can "arouse" God's wrath again, it has *not* been put away definitively by Christ's death; believers must still live obediently in order to remain free of that wrath. This contradicts Morris's claim that "Christ has really put our sins out of the way, effectively and finally,"[58] since ultimately one's forgiveness and salvation depend, not on what Christ accomplished in death, but on the way in which those saved continue to live after they have initially been delivered from God's wrath.

Clearly, then, penal substitution views see God's ultimate objective in sending Christ to die not as that of reforming sinners, promoting justice in the world, or preserving "the beauty and order of the universe," but satisfying a necessity found in God's nature, which prevents God from tolerating sin. As F. F. Bruce comments with regard to Heb. 9:24: "If sinners are to appear before God, even by proxy, through the representation of a sinless high priest, they must be cleansed from sin, or else the very presence of God would be polluted."[59] The purpose of Christ's death is to safeguard God's perfect holiness and justice by keeping all sin and impurity out of God's presence while still allowing God to save human beings from the punishment they deserve for their sins.

According to penal substitution views, the type of justice to which Christ's substitutionary death responds is not *restorative* justice or *distributive* justice, which are aimed at healing and equity, but *retributive* or *punitive* justice, which demands retribution for wrongs committed in the past. In this case, God's justice is satisfied through Christ's death, not because his death brings about some desired change in the condition of human beings directly, but because it satisfies God's just demand that sin receive its proper retribution. Undoubtedly, a change in the human condition results from Christ's death, in that believers are now forgiven whereas previously they were not, but this change is *indirect* rather than *direct*: Christ's death effects a change *in God*, transforming a God who could *not* forgive sins into one who *can*. The change in the human condition is the result of this prior change in God.

Premise 2: Christ's death was absolutely necessary for human salvation, since nothing else could have made it possible for God to remit the sins of human beings without compromising God's justice.

This premise follows from the previous one. Biblical scholars defending penal substitution views must insist that, outside of sending Christ to die, there was *no other way* for God to be able to save sinners from the punishment due to them for their sins. Ladd, for example, commenting on Rom. 3:26, writes: "If there had been no death of Christ, God would have been *unable* to justify the sinner."[60] Peter Stuhlmacher finds the same idea in texts such as Mark

57. Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1983), 204.
58. Morris, *Cross*, 6.
59. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed. (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 230.
60. Ladd, *Theology*, 473 (emphasis added).

10:45 and 14:24: "The sin offering of the sinless one, desired by God—the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus' life—made it *possible* for God the judge to acquit sinners and give them life without any lessening of his no to sin."[61] To say that without Christ's death God would have been *unable* to justify sinners or that Christ's self-offering made it *possible* for God to acquit sinners is to say that it would have been *impossible* for God to do these things without Christ's death. Morris in particular stresses this point: "If God simply forgives, then nothing more is needed. The cross is not needed. The cross is no more than a piece of useless embroidery. The cross is emptied of its meaning.... If his death did nothing to bring about our forgiveness, then exactly why did Christ die?"[62]

The problem with Morris's logic here, of course, is that it involves assuming precisely what needs to be demonstrated, namely, that God would not have sent God's Son to die such a cruel and horrible death had it not been absolutely necessary for human salvation. In reality, this is the starting-point from which penal substitution views develop their arguments, rather than the previous premise that God's justice must be satisfied before God can remit sins; this latter premise is maintained only so that Christ's death can be spoken of as indispensable for human beings to be forgiven and saved. The ultimate concern, however, is to uphold the notion that Jesus' death was an act of immense love on the part of both God and Jesus himself, as Paul and the other New Testament writers repeatedly affirm. Witherington explains the idea thus: "If Jesus' death was optional, not absolutely necessary for the salvation of the world, it is hard to see how anyone could view God as a truly loving God. No parent who loved an only child would send him to die such a hideous death unless it was absolutely necessary and the situation demanded it. Yet Paul tells us that God did this as an act of love and mercy."[63]

Premise 3: What Christ suffered in his passion and death was sufficient to satisfy God's justice.

In order to maintain that it was necessary for Christ to die in order for God to remit sins justly, it must be shown that his death was sufficient to satisfy the penalty or consequences that God's law dictated upon those to be saved. This affirmation is often made explicitly by New Testament scholars. According to Eduard Schweizer, when Paul alludes to Christ's death in Colossians, he affirms the "sole and full sufficiency of Christ."[64] Similarly, George Buchanan attributes to Paul the idea that "[i]n his record system God valued Christ's death as sufficient credit to balance the books...."[65]

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61. Stuhlmacher, *Reconciliation*, 55 (emphasis added).

62. Morris, *Cross*, 369, 371.

63. Witherington, *Paul's Narrative*, 160.

64. Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary*, trans. Andrew Chester (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 257.

65. George W. Buchanan, "The Day of Atonement and Paul's Doctrine of Redemption," *NovT* 32 (1990): 244. See also F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 50; Witherington, *Paul's Narrative*, 165.

The claim that Jesus' death was sufficient to satisfy the demands of God's justice requires that one posit some type of equivalency between what Christ endured in his death and the penalty or consequences to which sinful humanity was subject. Some criterion must be established in order to distinguish what is *sufficient* from what would have been *insufficient* and then, on that basis, Christ's death must be quantified in some way so as to maintain that it fulfilled the criterion of sufficiency.[66]

It is rather rare for biblical scholars to discuss this question, primarily because it is not addressed anywhere in the New Testament. Nevertheless, like the first two premises just mentioned, this premise is indispensable in order to sustain that God's justice was satisfied by Christ's substitutionary death: if what Christ suffered was not equivalent to what human beings collectively were condemned to suffer because of their sins, then Christ's death cannot be considered sufficient for them to be saved. Those New Testament scholars who do deal with the question tend merely to assume this equivalence without presenting any type of evidence from Scripture in support of their assumption, so that once again we are dealing with a presupposition rather than a biblically-grounded argument.

Virtually all proponents of the penal substitution interpretation of the New Testament writings identify the penalty endured by Christ in the stead of others as death itself. Serious problems arise, however, when one attempts to equate what Christ endured with what human beings supposedly were condemned to endure on account of their sins. Morris, for example, states that "the death of the One took the place of the death of the many.... Christ died the death that sinners should have died."[67]

Yet what does this death involve? And how is it equivalent to the death that human beings were condemned to suffer? If the penalty is identified with physical death, Christ can hardly be said to have endured that penalty on the cross in the place of others, since all people continue to die physically. Traditionally, the penalty to which human beings are said to be subject on account of their sins is eternal death and damnation. Yet it can hardly be sustained that Christ endured this in the stead of sinners, since he did not become subject to eternal damnation. Although the suffering he endured in his passion and death was undoubtedly immense, it was not eternal, but lasted only for several hours. The New Testament does speak of Christ descending to hell after dying, yet it does not say that he suffered there. Furthermore, if the necessity were that Christ experience the torments of hell, then he would not have needed to die on a cross. Rather, the suffering that would be redemptive would be that which he endured *after* he had died and descended into hell rather than that which he endured while hanging on the cross.[68]

66. See, for example, Ben Witherington III, "The Death of Sin in the Death of Jesus: Atonement Theology in the NT," *WesITJ* 50 (2015): 11, 13.

67. Morris, *Cross*, 220-21.

68. Gathercole misses entirely the point from my book on Paul when he argues that, in Paul's thought, the death from which Christ saves others by dying as their substitute is distinct from the one which all people

The problem of equivalency also arises when it is claimed that the penalty Christ endured was sufficient to deliver billions of human beings from the penalty to which they were subject. According to what understanding of justice can the death of one innocent person be regarded as equivalent to the death of countless individuals of all times and places?

In an attempt to resolve this problem, proponents of penal substitution views usually understand the penalty endured by Christ in terms of some type of *spiritual experience* of death. Morris, for example, quotes Goguel's affirmation that "the sense of being abandoned by God must have caused unfathomable pain to him" in order to claim:

> The death that Jesus died was full of horror.... It is the terrible nature of the death that he died that is significant, and not merely the fact that he did die.... [The incarnation] means among other things that it became possible for Christ to die... the most bitter of deaths, the death of God-forsakenness.... Jesus Christ, perfect man, has drunk to the very dregs the cup of our sins. He has endured their consequences to the uttermost extent. So fully did he make himself one with sinful man that he entered into the God-forsakenness that is the lot of sinners. He died their death.[69]

This kind of affirmation, however, is extremely problematic. The New Testament undoubtedly speaks of believers being "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), and this may perhaps be referred to as a spiritual death. In reality, however, to speak of death in this way is to describe metaphorically the life of sinful human beings who have distanced themselves from God in *this* world, very few of whom in fact endure some type of ongoing hellish experience of God-forsakenness while on earth. Although it might be argued that this condition of separation from God becomes eternal if one dies in it, once again it cannot be said that Christ suffered this condition eternally in the place of others. Furthermore, if the necessity was that Christ endure this *spiritual* death in intense fashion, it is not clear why he also had to endure the *physical* death that

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experience at the end of their lives (*Defending Substitution*, 80, n1; see David A. Brondos, *Paul on the Cross: Reconstructing the Apostle's Story of Redemption*; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006, 108-9). Gathercole distinguishes between physical death, which he calls "death #1," metaphorical death, which he labels "death #2," and a third type of death ("death #3") to which Paul refers in passages such as Rom. 1:32, 6:23, 8:13, and 2 Cor. 2:16, among others. According to Gathercole, in these passages, "Paul does not mean 'die' in the everyday sense; he means something like 'suffer the divinely ordained penalty for sin'" or "perish" (*apollumi*; *Defending Substitution*, 80-82). While Gathercole—perhaps deliberately—does not state explicitly what "the divinely ordained penalty for sin" consists of, there can be no doubt that he has in mind eternal condemnation or damnation. However, because Christ did *not* undergo eternal condemnation or damnation during or after his crucifixion, Gathercole finds it impossible to affirm that Christ endured *that* death—eternal condemnation—in our place. Therefore, he is limited to stating that Christ died in our place a death that is *similar to* the eternal punishment for sins: "Christ has undergone a death *like* death #3 to save us from death #3.... Christ's substitutionary death addresses the plight not of death #1 (at least not directly) but of death #3. It is *like* 'perishing' in that it is the divinely ordained consequence of sin.... Paul's description of Christ's substitutionary death in 1 Corinthians 15:3 makes good sense *on analogy* with 'perishing' (death #3).... Christ *did* in his substitutionary death release us from the destiny of perishing...." (83; emphases added). For Christ to have truly died as humanity's substitute, however, it was not enough that he die a death that was *like* eternal condemnation or *analogous* to it, but that he actually undergo *that very same death*, that is, eternal condemnation—which, according to the New Testament, he did not.

69. Morris, *Cross*, 48-49. Cf. I. H. Marshall, *Aspects*, 3, 29, 30, 62-63, 67, 130, n34.

he did. In what sense, then, can his physical sufferings have been substitutionary and sufficient to satisfy the just demands of God or God's law?

As is evident from the quotations just cited, proponents of penal substitution views tend to address these problems by affirming that what Christ suffered was far more intense and painful than anything any other human being has ever suffered. Yet this also seems difficult to maintain. According to 2 Maccabees 6 and 7, for example, the Jewish martyr figures who refused to renounce obedience to the Mosaic law were whipped, tortured on the rack, had their tongues, hands, and feet cut off and their skin peeled off, and were scalped. Then, still conscious after all these torments, they were placed in frying pans to die there a slow, agonizing death. The physical sufferings that Jesus endured in his passion and death seem to pale in comparison. Physical tortures similar to those described in 2 Maccabees—and perhaps even worse—have continued to take place throughout human history, so that Jesus' death can hardly be said to have saved all human beings from sufferings that were at times far greater than his own.

For the same reasons, those proponents of penal substitution views who affirm that Jesus suffered the *intrinsic consequences* of human sin rather than any type of extrinsic divine punishment or penalty seem to have little basis for sustaining that what Jesus suffered was equivalent in value to what all of humanity was condemned to suffer. Therefore, there seems to be no basis for arguing that the suffering that Jesus endured during his last hours was equal to the suffering that people of all times and places throughout human history have deserved for their sins. A further problem is that the penalty supposedly dictated by God or God's law was simply *death itself* rather than a particular amount of suffering or a certain *manner* of death.

Many critics of penal substitution views have also observed that it can hardly be considered just for an innocent person to be put to death instead of the guilty. Even if the innocent substitute offers to die voluntarily, this type of substitution runs contrary to justice as well as to human laws. Morris counters such an objection by arguing that, while this kind of substitution "is not permitted in the legal systems with which we are familiar," "we are not being saved with reference to our legal systems" but "with reference to the eternal law of God," which does not run "in all points exactly like all our human laws."[70] It is not clear, however, on what basis Morris can affirm the existence of such an "eternal law of God" that on this point is different from the laws that exist among human beings and are based on what God has revealed to them. There is no biblical basis for such a claim.

For these and other reasons,[71] the notion that what Jesus suffered in his passion and death was sufficient to satisfy God's justice is extremely prob-

70. Morris, *Cross*, 387.

71. For further arguments against the idea that what Christ suffered was equivalent to the penalty to which human beings were subject, see David A. Brondos, *Redeeming the Gospel: The Christian Faith Reconsidered* (SLHT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 64-66.

lematic to sustain. Yet if no equivalency can be established between what Jesus endured in his death and what sinful human beings were condemned to endure for their sins, then the basis upon which penal substitution views rest is taken out from under them. At best, it can be argued that God *accepted* what Jesus endured as sufficient to compensate for human sin and to satisfy divine justice, yet this would appear to be an arbitrary decision on God's part rather than something strictly demanded by God's righteous nature. Such an argument also undermines the claim that Jesus' sufferings and death were absolutely necessary for God to remit human sins justly, since God might have accepted something less as sufficient in order to forgive.

Once again, of course, the problem is not only that penal substitution views present serious theological difficulties such as these but also that, by ascribing the notion of penal substitution to the New Testament writers, proponents of these views inevitably imply that these same difficulties were present in the thought of Jesus' first followers. In that case, when the first believers taught that Jesus' death was sufficient to meet God's just demands for the punishment of sin and was equivalent to the penalty to which human beings collectively were subject, they must also have had to address all of the problems that such a teaching raises. There is, however, no evidence that either Jesus' followers or anyone else in antiquity ever discussed such problems.

Premise 4: In order for Christ to satisfy divine justice, he had to be perfectly sinless.

According to penal substitution views, if Jesus had not been perfectly sinless, he would not have been qualified to die in the place of others, since in that case he would have had to die for *his own* sins. Ladd, for example, comments: "Of all human beings, Jesus alone knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), and therefore being guiltless he did not have to die. His death was not the result of his own sin or guilt; it was suffered in the stead of others who were guilty and who deserved to die. By virtue of his unmerited death, sinners are delivered from the doom of death and from the experience of God's wrath that they eminently deserve."[72] Likewise, Paul Achtemeier, commenting on 1 Pet. 3:18, affirms that "it was possible for Christ's death to be 'for sin'" because "as righteous he did not need to die for his own sin."[73]

The implication of affirmations such as these is that, if Jesus had not chosen to die for others as their substitute, he would have lived forever on earth as long as he remained sinless. This presupposes that each human being dies as a result of his or her own sins. Such a view also raises the question of why Jesus was not born naturally mortal like all other human beings. Generally, this objection is answered by appealing in some way to Jesus' divinity, which

72. Ladd, *Theology*, 468.

73. Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on1 Peter* (ed. Eldon Jay Epp; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 247.

supposedly prevented him from being subject to sin and death by nature as the rest of human beings are.

When the claim that Christ had to be sinless and perfect in order to be able to die as humanity's substitute is combined with the notion that Christ's death was sufficient to satisfy God's justice, then it must also be maintained that God's justice would not allow God to accept any human being who was not entirely without sin. Hans Hübner, for example, writes that for Paul, "only total obedience to the Law is obedience to the Law at all.... [E]ven if just a single prescription of the Law is transgressed against, the effect is as if the entire Torah had been disregarded, i.e., total loss of righteousness...."[74]

The claim that God demands perfect sinlessness on the part of human beings in order to accept them is often made together with the claim that Christ's perfect righteousness and his sinlessness are imputed to believers.[75] Besides the fact that it is questionable that Paul thought in these terms, as even many proponents of penal substitution views now recognize,[76] it is problematic to attempt to combine this idea with that of penal substitution, which is distinct. If Christ's imputed righteousness is the basis upon which God forgives human beings and declares them righteous, then it is no longer Christ's *death* that serves as the basis for their forgiveness and justification, but the fact that Christ was perfectly sinless and righteous throughout his life to the very end and now shares that perfect righteousness with them. According to a distinction made in traditional Protestant teaching, this involves the imputation of Christ's *active* righteousness to believers, that is, the righteousness that results from his having committed no sins during his time on earth. In penal substitution views, however, what is reckoned to believers is Christ's *passive* righteousness, that is, his having endured willingly and innocently the penalty to which all were subject. Believers are declared righteous in the sense that they are now free of sin and no longer liable to any punishment because their sin received its due punishment when it was reckoned to Christ and he died in their stead.

To affirm that both Christ's *active* righteousness *and* his *passive* righteousness are imputed to believers therefore results in confusion and redundancy. Believers are said to be free from divine punishment both because they are sinless in God's eyes through the perfect righteousness of Christ that is reckoned to them *and* because Christ endured their punishment in their stead. It is not clear why both of these things should have been necessary; one or the other would have been sufficient. If Christ's sinlessness is imputed to

74. Hans Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought*, trans. James C. G. Greig (ed. John Riches; SNTW; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984), 24.

75. See, for example, Herman Ridderbos, "The Earliest Confession of the Atonement in Paul," in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L. L. Morris on his 60th Birthday* (ed. Robert Banks; Exeter: Paternoster, 1974), 84; Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 282-83; Matera, *II Corinthians*, 144.

76. See, for example, David E. Aune, "Recent Readings of Paul Relating to Justification by Faith," in *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification* (ed. Aune; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 231-33.

believers, then there was no need for the sins of believers and their punishment to be imputed to Christ; but if the sins of believers were imputed to Christ, they are sinless, not by virtue of Christ's sinlessness being reckoned to them, but by virtue of their sin having been reckoned to Christ. In response to this difficulty, Protestant theologians who have defended penal substitution interpretations of Christ's work have historically taught that the role that Christ's *active* obedience plays in justification is not that it is reckoned to believers in lieu of their own righteousness, but that it qualified Christ to die in their stead as their innocent substitute. Christ therefore had to live a perfectly sinless life, not so that his sinlessness could be imputed to others, but so that he might die for the sins of others rather than any sins of his own. The teaching that Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers has also commonly been criticized for implying that justification involves a "legal fiction," since God accepts believers as righteous and innocent even though they are *not* truly righteous, but instead remain sinners.

Biblical scholars commonly combine conflicting ideas such as these without recognizing the confusions and theological difficulties involved. Then, when they read those ideas back into Paul's writings, they feel obliged to conclude that Paul was "not a systematic thinker."[77] By this they mean that there are theological inconsistencies and even apparent contradictions running throughout his writings. Rarely do they acknowledge that the problem lies not with Paul, but rather with the fact that they have read back into Paul later theological ideas that are not his own.

Premise 5: In order for Christ to die as the substitute for sinful humanity, he had to be fully divine and fully human.

This claim was central to Anselm's argument. Anselm argued that, since the debt to be paid to God was owed by human beings, only one who was human could pay it. Yet, because the debt was infinitely greater than any sinful human being could pay, only one who was God could pay it. A similar claim is made in penal substitution views, although strictly speaking the argument is slightly different: in these views the problem is not that a debt of obedience must be paid to God, as Anselm taught, but rather that a sentence of death must be executed. Since it was human beings who were liable to that sentence, the one who was to die for other human beings as their substitute had to be a human being himself. Thus Witherington writes: "If Jesus had not been a human being, humans would not have had redemption, resurrection, reconciliation.... In short, for salvation to reach and to redeem humankind, it had to take the form of a human being."[78]

At the same time, as just noted under the previous premise, Jesus had to be a *sinless* human being. Yet because sinlessness is an impossibility for fallen

77. See, for example, Calvin J. Roetzel, *Paul: The Man and the Myth* (SPNT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 93-94; Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 506; Räisänen, *Paul*, xi. For a critique of this idea, see Douglas A. Campbell, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel: A Suggested Strategy* (JSNTSup 244; London: T & T Clark, 2005), 29-34.

78. Witherington, *Paul's Narrative*, 141-42.

human beings, the one who was to die as their substitute had to be divine, since only a divine being could live a perfectly sinless life. If a doctrine of original sin is maintained, according to which all human beings are born into a sinful and thus mortal condition, then it must also be argued that God's Son was born into an *unfallen* nature that was free of original sin. Such an idea is ascribed to Paul by scholars such as Witherington: "like Adam, Jesus was born with an unfallen nature... but *unlike* Adam, Jesus remained sinless and so could be an unblemished sacrifice for sin.... Paul seems to think that Jesus as divine, or God, was not subject to, nor could he be subject to, death."[79]

Premise 6: Both the incarnation and the earthly life of God's Son had as their sole objective his substitutionary death for others.

Anselm affirmed plainly that God's Son "became human for the purpose of dying."[80] This is maintained by biblical scholars as well. As noted above, Witherington claims that "Jesus saw his task in life to come and die, enduring God's overwhelming wrath."[81] Likewise, Morris, commenting on Heb. 2:9, affirms: "The whole purpose of the incarnation is seen as death. He came to die. He came to die 'for every man.'"[82]

It is important to note, however, that when the remission of sins is attributed exclusively to Jesus' death and not to anything that human beings do, Jesus' death must be seen as the *only* objective of the incarnation as well as Jesus' earthly life. Proponents of penal substitution views rarely make such an affirmation, and many would no doubt reject it. However, if salvation and forgiveness are based *solely on what Christ did on the cross, enduring humanity's punishment*, then Christ's saving work cannot be understood in terms of transforming human hearts or enabling human beings to change their behavior so as to live in accordance with God's will, since supposedly this new life is not the basis upon which human beings are forgiven and saved. The transformation of the conduct of believers thus plays no role whatsoever in their justification. To claim that believers must now live morally upright lives in order to be saved and forgiven is to deny that the sole basis for their salvation and forgiveness is the substitutionary death of Christ, and to contradict the affirmation that human beings "no longer need to assuage the wrath of God through their actions."[83]

For the same reason, according to penal substitution views, the sole objective of Christ's earthly life must have been to preserve himself free from sin and guilt by making sure that he never transgressed the law. In effect, this reduces Jesus' teaching and ministry to an unnecessary pastime, something that kept him occupied until he would die for others. Because believers are

79. Ibid., 140-41.

80. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 2.16.

81. Witherington, *Christology*, 124.

82. Morris, *Cross*, 278.

83. Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 31.

saved only by Christ's death and not by any works of their own, what Christ taught by word and example contributes in no way to human salvation and there is no real need for human beings to follow Christ's teaching. Obviously, such affirmations raise the question of why the four evangelists bothered to preserve in writing Jesus' teaching rather than merely announcing that he lived a sinless life and on that basis was able to endure the punishment human beings deserved in their place.

As noted above, advocates of penal substitution views often make the claim that it was necessary for God to punish human sin rather than freely forgiving it so that human beings might know that God does not look upon sin lightly or tolerate it. Witherington, for example, writes: "Christ had to die to reflect God's just and righteous character and meet God's just demands for the punishment of human sin.... Christ's death showed that God was righteous and could not pass over sin forever."[84]

This claim raises the same difficulty just mentioned: if Jesus died in order to demonstrate that God does not leave sin unpunished, then his death had one of two purposes: it was designed by God either to dissuade human beings from sinning, or else to let them know of the need they had for Christ to endure their punishment in their stead, since God cannot leave sin unpunished. In either case, Christ's death is then seen as salvific by virtue of *what it reveals* to human beings. Their forgiveness, justification, and salvation ultimately depend, not directly on Christ's death, but on their responding in faith and repentance to the revelation they have received through Christ. Furthermore, as noted above, if human beings are no longer subject to punishment for their sins because of Christ's substitutionary death, then what his death reveals is not that they must refrain from sinning because God inevitably punishes human sin, but that they now can sin freely without being concerned about divine punishment. God cannot justly punish their sins a second time, since God has already had Christ endure their punishment in their stead. This difficulty leads to the final premise to be considered.

Premise 7: Human beings are saved and delivered from God's wrath solely by Jesus' substitutionary death on their behalf, yet they must still come to faith in order to receive that salvation.

Proponents of penal substitution views have commonly made a distinction between an *objective* and a *subjective* salvation. Christ's death is said to bring about an *objective* salvation in that it saves *humanity as a whole* in some sense. Nevertheless, human beings must still receive that salvation subjectively by faith in order for it to be effective. Pauline scholars such as John Ziesler, for example, have claimed that the first Christians believed that "Christ's death was a sacrifice for *all* human sin" and "that it was of universal effect."[85] According to Rudolf Schnackenburg, Paul taught that Christ "has reconciled

84. Witherington, *Paul's Narrative*, 66, 259-60.

85. John A. Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 92.

the whole of humanity to God."[86] Herman Ridderbos attributes to Paul the teaching that justification is "rooted in what Christ once accomplished for us and without us (*pro nobis et extra nos*)," and that this constitutes "the 'objective' significance of Christ's death and resurrection as the only and unrepeatable act of atonement...."[87] Morris finds in the New Testament the idea of a "completed work" accomplished in Christ: "he offered himself once for all on the cross.... The offering made by Jesus is perpetual in its efficacy.... Thus our forgiveness rests upon the fact that our penalty has been borne for us. And since the penalty has been borne, it cannot be imposed on us again."[88] In other words, the objective salvation of all humanity was accomplished once and for all when Christ died on the cross, bearing the penalty of all people as their substitute. Once again, Morris's words indicate that human beings are now free to sin as they desire without having to fear any punishment: "since the penalty has been borne, it cannot be imposed on us again," no matter how much sin and evil we commit. To affirm that one *can* fall under sin's penalty again by living contrary to God's will is to maintain that Christ *did not* take away definitively divine punishment for human sin in his death, since that punishment can be reimposed. Whether that happens or not depends on how we live, and therefore depends, not on what *Christ* did, but on what *we* do. This is double justification: while justified initially on the basis of Christ's death, from then on we must *justify ourselves* through our works by living as God desires in order to avoid falling back under God's wrath.

As several of these quotations demonstrate, this objective salvation is generally understood in terms of some type of "effect" produced by Jesus' death. New Testament scholars routinely speak of the "redemptive effects of Jesus' death and resurrection,"[89] "the complete and abiding efficacy of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice,"[90] and the "continuing effects" and "continuing power of his death."[91] When Jesus' death or blood is said to have propitiated God, this "effect" is thought to involve a change in God: God has been changed from a God who invariably punishes human beings for their sins into a God who now forgives them their sins freely. According to Morris, "God now treats the sinner differently from before. Instead of God's severity the sinner experiences God's grace, which is only another way of saying that propitiation has taken place.... God now looks on man no longer as the object of his holy and

86. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 126.

87. Ridderbos, "Earliest Confession," 84.

88. Morris, *Cross*, 283, 382. See also Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 225-26.

89. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 127.

90. Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (NTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10; cf. 14, 36, 40. See also Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 314.

91. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 163; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 249.

righteous wrath, but as the object of his love and his blessing."[92] Thanks to Christ's death, the God who looked upon and treated human beings in one way has been transformed into a God who looks upon and treats human beings in a different way.

Yet if Christ's death effects the forgiveness and salvation of all humanity universally, why should people still need to come to faith subjectively in order to be saved? Once it is said that faith is necessary for one to be forgiven and saved from God's wrath and condemnation, then it seems clear that those who *do not* come to faith are *not* forgiven nor saved from God's wrath and condemnation. If only "those who are of faith no longer need fear the wrath," as Morris claims,[93] then those who are *not* of faith *do* need to fear the wrath and were *not* actually saved from it by Christ's death. When Christ died, not all people were saved, but only those who would have faith. In this case, ultimately it is not Christ's death that obtains salvation and deliverance for people, but their faith. If people do *not* come to faith, then their sins and God's wrath at those sins have *not* been put away by Jesus' death "effectively and finally" and the penalty for their sins is indeed imposed on them again. Their sins are therefore punished twice: once when Christ died and again when they suffer divine condemnation.

In order to address this problem, it has been common to make a distinction between the *sufficiency* and the *efficiency* of Christ's death. Witherington ascribes this distinction to Paul: "Christ's death is seen as sufficient for all, but only efficient for those who respond to the offer of salvation." Even though it was sufficient for all people, "not all receive it and believe it, and for those there is the fate of facing eternal destruction."[94] Yet if faith is necessary for one to be saved instead of "facing eternal destruction," then Christ's death is *not* sufficient for this end, since something else *in addition* to Christ's death is required, namely faith. Ultimately, it is their response to the offer of salvation that saves people rather than the cross.

Another way in which New Testament scholars have addressed this problem is by making a distinction between the *ground* and the *means* of justification or forgiveness: Christ's death constitutes the *ground* upon which people obtain the remission of sins, while faith constitutes the *means* by which they receive this remission.[95] This distinction becomes meaningless, however, once faith is regarded as necessary for salvation, since those who do not come to faith are *not* ultimately justified and thus any ground for their justification is removed or nullified.

In the Reformed tradition, it has been common to respond to this problem by positing a "limited atonement." According to this idea, Christ died only for the sins of those whom God had predestined for salvation, that is,

92. Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 212-13, 247.

93. Ibid., 201.

94. Witherington, *Paul's Narrative*, 165. See also Witherington, "Death of Sin," 13.

95. See, for example, Ladd, *Theology*, 490; John A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry* (SNTSMS 20; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 168.

those in whom God had previously determined to create saving faith. Christ therefore did not endure the penalty of unbelievers, who must suffer that penalty themselves. Once again, however, if faith is said to be necessary for salvation, then Christ's death is *not* sufficient for believers to be saved, since something else is required on their part, namely, that they be brought to faith. Furthermore, what ultimately saves human beings is not Christ's death, but God's decision to elect them for salvation. Christ's death is thereby reduced to a mere formality.

A related difficulty arises when it is affirmed that, even though Christ has *already* delivered believers from God's wrath, he continues to make intercession to God for them when they sin. It is not clear why it should still be necessary for Christ to implore God to put away God's wrath at sinners and forgive them if, when he died, God's wrath was taken away "effectively and finally." Biblical scholars usually attempt to combine these two ideas by affirming that Christ intercedes to God on the basis of what he did in the past. He perpetually stands before God in heaven presenting God with his blood, which continues to have atoning power.[96] Nevertheless, this ongoing intercession seems to be unnecessary and superfluous if God already granted forgiveness once and for all when Christ died.

When faith is said to be necessary for salvation, not only is Christ's death regarded as insufficient for that salvation, but the meaning of his death is changed as well. As just noted above, its purpose becomes that of bringing about faith in people through what it *reveal*s. In addition to letting all people know that God does not leave human sin unpunished so that they may recognize their need to be delivered from that punishment by turning to Jesus in faith, Jesus' death supposedly reveals to them the immensity of God's love. This love consists of having sent Christ to endure the punishment due to human beings rather than punishing human beings themselves. Yet if the divine revelations given through Christ's death were necessary for people to come to faith in order to be saved by that faith, then what delivers them from divine wrath and punishment is not Christ's substitutionary death, but the faith that Christ's death has made possible through that which it reveals.

In penal substitution views, therefore, the effectiveness and sufficiency of Jesus' death come to be regarded as *the object and content of saving faith*. Human beings are saved by *believing* that Jesus' death accomplished their salvation. Johan Christiaan Beker, for example, affirms that "faith in Christ's death for us will be the decisive criterion at the future last judgment."[97] For Witherington, God acquits and accepts "only those who have faith in Christ and his atoning work.... [F]aith in Christ's death is reckoned or credited to believers as acquittal, leaving them in right-standing with God."[98] In this case, God saves them,

96. See, for example, Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 382-83; Morris, *Cross*, 283-84.

97. Johan Christiaan Beker, *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul's Thought*, trans. Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 84.

98. Witherington, *Paul's Narrative*, 260-61.

not because Christ's death was sufficient to atone for their sins, but because *they believe* that Christ's death was sufficient to atone for their sins.

Proponents of penal substitution views also regard Christ's resurrection as salvific by virtue of what it reveals. It demonstrates that God accepted Jesus' substitutionary death as atoning so that people might believe that his death was sufficient to propitiate God's wrath and attain God's forgiveness for them. In the words of Ridderbos, "Christ's resurrection is the indispensable complement of his death for our sins. Christ's death alone is for that reason insufficient.... It was in his death that he atoned for our sins and in this he was recognized and accepted by God in his resurrection. For that reason we would 'still be in our sins' had Christ not been raised. Christ's resurrection is the public recognition and acceptance by God of his (Christ's) sacrifice as the eradication and expiation of our sins."[99] In other words, Christ's resurrection is salvific because it enables people to believe that his death was effective in dealing with sins. Yet if people must *believe* that Christ's death was effective in order for it actually to *be* effective, then what makes Christ's death effective is the faith of believers rather than his death per se, which was *insufficient* for their salvation, as Ridderbos himself is forced to recognize here.

For this reason, proponents of penal substitution inevitably end up making faith the one "work" necessary for human beings to obtain forgiveness and salvation. Initially, all people are forgiven and reconciled to God by virtue of Christ's substitutionary death. However, if they do not come to faith, they forfeit this forgiveness and reconciliation and fall back under God's wrath and punishment. In Ladd's words, "until God's offer of objective reconciliation has been received, no person is in fact reconciled to God; she or he is still a sinner and in the last day will suffer the full and awful outpouring of the wrath of a holy God."[100] This makes the objective/subjective distinction meaningless.

In the end, then, most proponents of penal substitution views in reality do not maintain that Jesus' death actually attained salvation and forgiveness for all, but only that it *opened up the possibility* that human beings might now be saved by having faith in his death. What obtains forgiveness for believers and delivers them from God's wrath is their faith in Christ's death rather than Christ's death per se. This means that what has changed as a result of Christ's death is simply that previously human beings could *not* be saved by faith in his death, but now they *can*.

PHYSICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF CHRIST'S WORK IN NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

According to a physical understanding of Christ's work, his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection were aimed at bringing about some type of ontological change in the nature (*physis*) of human beings or the created order as a

99. Ridderbos, "Earliest Confession," 78.

100. Ladd, *Theology*, 496-97.

whole. This physical understanding exists in numerous forms, yet a common element is that there is some power present in nature to which human beings have become subject and from which they must be delivered.

On the basis of the New Testament allusions to Christ's defeat of evil powers and principalities,[101] it has been common to claim that Christ's work was thought to consist of conquering the devil and other demonic beings in order to liberate human beings from their bondage to those beings. This is the most common form of the *Christus Victor* idea. According to this idea, because these forces of evil are supernatural, they are stronger than human beings, making it impossible for human beings to overcome those forces on their own. For this reason, it was necessary for God to send God's Son, who delivers human beings from their slavery to these powers by virtue of the superior divine strength he possesses. At the same time, through his death and resurrection, Christ also delivers creation as a whole from its subjection to those forces.

Some scholars, such as Wright, claim that these ideas go back to Jesus himself, who saw his death in terms of a "battle" against "satan," the "real enemy" who stood behind the Jewish and Roman authorities. Jesus thought that by engaging these forces of evil and letting them do their worst to him, he would defeat evil.[102] Other scholars attribute similar ideas to Paul, who allegedly conceived of Christ engaging "hostile spiritual powers" in combat.[103] These powers included not only demonic forces but other "representatives of the old age—sin, death, the law, and the flesh," all of which "have been overthrown and caused to release their grip on those who are now in Christ."[104] Obviously, to speak in these terms involves personifying realities that we generally regard as impersonal, as if these forces had a will of their own and could hold human beings in their grip. Paul is thus said to have taught that "the rule of sin and death is finally broken" by means of "[t]he act of God whose victory over sin was accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus...."[105] According to Beker, Paul conceived of "major apocalyptic forces" as "ontological powers that determine the human situation within the context of God's created order and that comprise the 'field' of death, sin, the law and the flesh." The death of Christ "marks the defeat of the apocalyptic powers" as "the final judgment of the old age" and "inaugurates the cosmic triumph of God...."[106]

When the powers to which human beings are subject are instead regarded as *impersonal*, an intrinsic *cause-and-effect* relationship is posited between sin

101. See John 12:31; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Rev. 17:14; 20:10; cf. Eph. 1:20-21; 1 Pet. 3:22.

102. Wright, *Jesus*, 564-65.

103. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 75.

104. Don B. Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (WUNT 79; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994), 72.

105. Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (NovTSup 62; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 70. See also Chris Forbes, "Paul's Principalities and Powers: Demythologizing Apocalyptic?," *JSNT* 82 (2001): 61-88.

106. Johan Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle*: *The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 189.

and its consequences, such as death. Christ's divinity allows him to absorb those powers into himself and thus deliver human beings from suffering the consequences they produce. In this way, the maleficent forces in human nature are neutralized or destroyed through their contact with the divine.

James Dunn, for example, claims that Paul understood sin as something analogous to a poison, virus, or malignant cancer dwelling within the flesh of human beings: according to Paul, "there is also a violent toxin within, whose poison, if allowed to spread unchecked, will slowly kill the whole organism."[107] Death is the consequence of this power in human flesh.[108] In order to overcome this malignant power, God sent God's Son in the flesh. Through his death, Christ puts an end to the "infected" flesh of human beings and then, through his resurrection, he brings a new creation into existence. Dunn explains:

> The cancer of sin had taken such a firm root on the flesh, on humankind, that the surgery had to be radical; the flesh had to be destroyed, humankind had to die. The old age had to be wound up and a new beginning made. For Paul the good news was that this was just what God had done in Christ: Christ's complete oneness with sinful flesh meant that his death effected the destruction of that sinful flesh, just as his resurrection meant a new beginning for humankind.[109]

According to Dunn, "The sting of death has been drawn by having been used on Christ, absorbed by him, its poison exhausted in the death of Christ...."[110] What took place in Christ "actually deals with the power of sin, destroying the malignant cancer in death...."[111] "His death was itself an epochal event which broke the consequence of sin's hold on the flesh...."[112] Together with his death, Christ's resurrection is "the beginning of a new humanity, no longer contaminated by sin and no longer subject to death."[113] Dunn compares this to a vaccination: "In vaccination germs are introduced into a healthy body in order that by destroying these germs the body will build up its strength. So we might say the germ of sin was introduced into Jesus, the only one healthy/whole enough to let that sin run its full course.... [H]is new humanity is 'germ resistant,' 'sin-resistant'...."[114]

Dunn is willing to speak of God's wrath in this context, yet insists on understanding that wrath in terms of a natural consequence of sin that is removed by Christ's death: "God's wrath means a process willed by God—the outworking of the destructive consequences of sin...."[115] "[T]he atoning act

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107. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 81; cf. 214-15, 386; Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC 38A; Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 182, 439.

108. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 96.

109. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 439.

110. Ibid., 372.

111. Ibid., 182. Cf. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 223.

112. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 421; see also 422.

113. James D. G. Dunn, "Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus," in *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology* (ed. S. W. Sykes; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 52. See also Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 372.

114. Dunn, "Paul's Understanding," 50.

115. Ibid., 49; see also 50.

thus removes the sin which provoked God's wrath, but it does so by acting on the sin rather than on God. The imagery is more of the removal of a corrosive stain or the neutralization of a life-threatening virus than of anger appeased by punishment."[116] In this case, it is not Christ's death itself that removes God's wrath. Rather, Christ's death and resurrection remove the power of sin present in human nature and, because this sin was the cause of God's wrath, that wrath is also taken away. For Dunn, however, ultimately this is valid only for believers who identify with Christ: "the wrath of God exhausted itself in the death of Jesus, and so is already exhausted for believers insofar as they identified themselves with Christ in his death."[117]

The notion that Paul conceived of God's wrath as a natural process rather than a divine disposition is commonly associated with C. H. Dodd, who made such a view popular. Dodd claimed that Paul "constantly uses 'wrath' or 'the Wrath' in a curiously impersonal way" in order "not to describe the attitude of God to man, but to describe an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe."[118] However, God's wrath can also be understood in terms of not intervening to interrupt the cause-and-effect process, but instead allowing it to work itself out naturally. Dunn hints at this idea in the passage quoted above, where he describes God's wrath as "a process willed by God." Christopher Marshall claims that this idea is present in Rom. 1:18-32, where the allusion to God's wrath should be understood as "God's personal consent to the intrinsic outworking of people's estrangement from God...."[119] In this case, Christ can be said to have endured God's wrath at sin only in the sense that God had him experience the natural consequences of human sin without intervening to save him.

As noted above, like the notion of God's wrath, the idea of death as a "penalty" can be understood as involving the natural consequences of sin rather than something God imposes from above as a personal agent. This idea has been associated not only with Dodd but with a number of other biblical scholars as well.[120] Among more recent proponents of this interpretation is Travis, who argues that in passages such as Rom. 1:18-32, Paul does not speak of God's wrath in terms of "the retributive inflicting of punishment from outside, but God's allowing of people to experience the intrinsic consequences of their refusal to live in relationship to him."[121] Therefore "to speak of Christ on the cross suffering our 'punishment,' or enduring a retributive pen-

116. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 214-15.

117. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 268.

118. C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (MNTC 6; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), 21, 23.

119. Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 64.

120. For a summary of this discussion, see Gathercole, "Justified," 169-81. In contrast to Dodd and Marshall, Gathercole rejects what he calls "the 'immanentist' view of punishment, whereby the effects of sin are bound up with, and the outworking of, the nature of sin itself" (169).

121. Travis, "Christ," 338; cf. 345. See also C. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, 62: "this is not a matter of a penalty being added on to an offense as an arbitrary, external retributive punishment. It is the penalty of inherent consequences, something intrinsic to the nature of the offense itself."

alty for our sins, is to go further than Paul himself goes."[122] Like other New Testament scholars, Travis prefers to use verbs that refer to natural processes, such as "absorb," "exhaust," and "neutralize." He thus speaks of "Christ's death absorbing or neutralizing the effects of sin.... Paul says that [Christ] entered into and bore on our behalf the destructive consequences of sin. Standing where we stand, he bore the consequences of our alienation from God. In so doing he absorbed and exhausted them, so that they should not fall on us."[123]

Scholars interpreting the New Testament language concerning Christ's death in this way often use the language of "judgment," yet this too is understood differently than in penal substitution views. God's judgment against sin is not a forensic pronouncement but an *actual destruction* of evil powers such as sin and death. Dunn, for example, argues that "for Paul the way in which Christ's death cancels out man's sin is by *destroying* it...."[124] On the cross "God passed judgement on sin in the flesh."[125] According to Travis, Christ "experienced divine judgment on sin in the sense that he endured the God-ordained consequences of human sinfulness"; thus this judgment "is not inflicted by God 'from outside,' but is the intrinsic outworking, under God's control, of the consequences of human choices and actions...."[126] The "apocalyptic powers" can also be said to have been judged in Christ's death in that they are stripped of their power:[127] "The death of Christ is indeed the negation of the evil powers, but even more it is their judgment."[128]

In order for salvation to follow upon this judgment of destruction, of course, there must be some type of new creation arising out of the judgment. This is usually linked with Christ's resurrection, which ushers in a new age, a new reality, and new possibilities for human beings.[129] Dunn attributes these ideas to Paul:

> It is by his death and resurrection that Christ breaks through the cul-de-sac of death and inaugurates a new humanity as last Adam.... Jesus is the only one who, having reached the end of this age of Adam, broke through the road-end barrier of death into the age beyond; who, having died Adam's death as an act of obedience, rose to a new life beyond. Christ's death and resurrection thus provide the doorway—for Paul the only doorway—through death to life, from this age under the power of sin to the new age free from sin.[130]

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122. Travis, "Christ," 341.

123. Ibid., 337, 345. See also Timothy Gombis, "The 'Transgressor' and the 'Curse of the Law': The Logic of Paul's Argument in Galatians 2-3," *NTS* 53 (2007): 90; Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 376, 432; Fung, *Galatians*, 149.

124. Dunn, "Paul's Understanding," 49.

125. Ibid., 51.

126. Travis, "Christ," 345.

127. Beker, *Triumph*, 80, 82-83.

128. Beker, *Paul*, 191; see also 189-90.

129. See, for example, Hultgren, *Christ*, 35; Richard B. Hays, "Crucified with Christ: A Synthesis of the Theology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians, and Galatians," in *Pauline Theology*, Vol. 1: *Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (ed. Jouette M. Bassler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 233; Scot McKnight, *Jesus and his Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 346.

130. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 285, 329.

According to this type of interpretation, then, the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection was to bring into existence a "new humanity." This represents another idea commonly ascribed to Paul. Richard Hays, for example, affirms that for Paul Christ "constitutes in himself a new, faithful humanity."[131] According to Don Garlington, in Paul's mind Christ "was not simply one just man amongst many, but a man of universal significance, the 'last Adam,' patriarch of a new humanity."[132] Robin Scroggs similarly writes: "In his body of glory Christ is true humanity.... Christ by virtue of his resurrection is... changed into the true man.... Christ not only is true humanity; he also mediates this true humanity to the believer...."[133] Christ is the "reality of God's intent for humanity" and the "direct agent of this humanity," in whom "the restoration of man's humanity" has taken place.[134] As Margaret Thrall notes, Christ can also be spoken of as the "prototype of this new humanity."[135] "In Christ's death the old form of human life was brought to an end, in order that a new kind of human existence might become possible."[136] For Paul, this new humanity liberated from sin and death involves a "new creation." In Beker's words: "Just as in Christ's death the powers of sin, the law, the flesh, and death are judged, so in Christ's resurrection the 'new creation' emerges."[137]

Christ's death is thus seen as bringing about a change in the *ontological* condition of human beings rather than in their forensic status before God. Undoubtedly, God forgives the sins of those who form part of this new humanity and declares them righteous, yet God does so not by virtue of Christ's death but on account of the ontological change effected in them by Christ and his death and resurrection. If powers such as sin, death, the law, and the curse are said to be involved, what is removed is their actual *power* to bring about the death of human beings rather than their *right* to do so, as in penal substitution views of Christ's work. Instead of speaking of a change taking place *in God*, physical interpretations of Christ's work posit a change *in the natural order*: sin no longer results in death as its consequence because what has taken place in Christ has negated sin's consequences. Together with his resurrection, Christ's death is salvific either in the sense that it removes the power of sin from the flesh or nature that all human beings share, or else in the sense that it alters the relationship between sin and death so that, even though sin remains in human beings, its power to cause death in the way it did previously has been "neutralized."

In order for what took place in Christ to have an effect in others as well, some type of link between Christ and others must be posited. Pauline scholars

131. Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed. (BRS; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), xxx.

132. Garlington, *Faith*, 154.

133. Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 92-93, 102 (emphasis removed).

134. Ibid., 108-9.

135. Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:429.

136. Ibid., 1:424.

137. Beker, *Paul*, 204.

generally use the language of "participation" to speak of this link. Although this term has been understood in different ways, many scholars attribute to Paul the idea of an *ontological* or *ontic* participation. Jan Lambrecht, for example, claims that Paul understood "participation" as the "natural result or effect of his union with Christ," and adds: "However difficult it may be to specify that unity, a kind of ontological union with Christ is presupposed by Paul and referred to frequently in his writings."[138] According to Douglas Campbell, for Paul this union involves a "radical ontological transformation of the person."[139] Similarly, Scot McKnight writes: "Jesus' death for Paul is fundamentally about the eschatological transfer from one sphere to another.... [T]he transfer is ontic transformation.... [T]he believer acquires this transformed existence by inclusion in the eschatological Second Adam, in Christ, and by participation in the death and resurrection of the Representative One, that is, by *co-crucifixion* and *co-resurrection*."[140] Beker also claims that for Paul "the term 'the new creation' does not just refer to a moral change but has ontological status."[141]

This type of interpretation of Paul's soteriology goes back to Adolf Deissmann at the end of the nineteenth century.[142] Deissmann pointed to Paul's repeated use of the phrase "in Christ" and similar phrases, such as "in Christ Jesus," "in the Lord," and "into Christ," in order to describe the relation of believers to Christ. According to Deissmann, Paul intended such phrases to be understood "vividly and mystically," since for Paul Christ was "not a 'historical' personage, but a reality and power of the present, an 'energy.'"[143] Deissmann spoke of Paul's "passion mysticism," claiming that each member of the body of Christ "mystically experiences all that that Body experienced and experiences."[144] Although Deissmann used the language of mysticism to characterize Paul's thought, he also ascribed to Paul the idea of an ontological union between Christ and believers: "Just as the air of life, which we breathe, is 'in' us and fills us, and yet we at the same time live in this air and breathe it, so it is also with the Christ-intimacy of the Apostle Paul: Christ in him, he in Christ."[145]

Following Deissmann, in his book *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, Schweitzer affirmed that Paul did not think of the body of Christ as "an isolated entity, but as the point from which the dying and rising again, which began with Christ, passes over to the elect who are united with him; just as,

138. Jan Lambrecht, "The Nekrosis of Jesus: Ministry and Suffering in 2 Corinthians 4,7-15," in *Studies on 2 Corinthians* (ed. Reimund Bieringer and J. Lambrecht; BETL 112; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 326. Joseph A. Fitzmyer similarly speaks of the presence of Christ in believers as an "ontological reality" (*To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies*, 2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 177).

139. Campbell, *Quest*, 60.

140. McKnight, *Jesus*, 350-51.

141. Beker, *Paul*, 227.

142. On what follows, see Brondos, *Paul*, 151-66.

143. Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. William E. Wilson, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), 136, 138, 140.

144. Ibid., 182.

145. Ibid., 140.

on the other hand, the elect no longer carry on an independent existence, but are now only the body of Christ."[146] For Schweitzer, whoever is "baptized into Christ is united in one corporeity with him and the other elect who are 'in Christ' (Gal. iii.27-28), and undergoes with him his dying and rising again (Rom. vi.3-4)."[147] According to Schweitzer, "The mystical body of Christ is thus for Paul not a pictorial expression, nor a conception which has arisen out of symbolical and ethical reflections, but an actual entity," which is "founded on the fact that the existences in question are physically inter-dependent in the same corporeity, and the one can pass over into the other."[148] On the basis of 1 Cor. 6:16-17, he refers to Paul's "doctrine of the union of believers with Christ as a physical bodily union," and elsewhere sees baptism and the Lord's Supper as bringing this union about: "What happens in the 'Lord's meal' is that which is asserted in the mystical doctrine of the being-in-Christ. The eating and drinking effects union with the body of Christ in the same way that baptism does. This is, according to Paul, what Jesus meant when he spoke at the Supper of eating and drinking his body and blood."[149]

In his work *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*, published in 1952, the British New Testament scholar John A. T. Robinson followed Deissmann and Schweitzer in claiming that "the concept of the body forms the keystone of Paul's theology."[150] After reviewing the Pauline passages that speak of dying with Christ, Robinson affirmed that in Paul's thought

> Christians have died in, with and through the crucified body of the Lord (have a share, that is, in the actual death that he died unto sin historically, 'once for all'.... It is only by baptism into Christ, that is 'into (the) one body' (1 Cor. 12.13), only by an actual 'participation in the body of Christ' (1 Cor. 10.16, R.V.M.), that a man can be saved through his body on the Cross. The Christian, because he is in the Church and united with him in the sacraments, is part of Christ's body so literally that all that happened in and through that body in the flesh can be repeated in and through him now....[151]

Robinson concludes: "It is almost impossible to exaggerate the materialism and crudity of Paul's doctrine of the Church as literally now the resurrection *body* of Christ."[152]

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, Pauline scholars have continued to regard the idea of union with Christ and his death as central to Paul's thought, often presenting it as an alternative to his forensic or

146. Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 118. The German original *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* appeared in 1930 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr).

147. Ibid., 19.

148. Ibid., 127.

149. Ibid., 128, 269.

150. John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (SBT 5; London: SCM, 1952), 9; see also 48: "the concept of the Body supplies the lynch-pin of Paul's thought."

151. Ibid., 47 (emphasis removed).

152. Ibid., 51.

juristic soteriology.[153] The thought of both Bultmann and Karl Barth was particularly influential.[154] The terminology of participation became widespread among New Testament scholars in large part due to the 1977 publication of Sanders's book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*. Drawing on the work of Bultmann and that of biblical scholars such as D. E. H. Whiteley, Robert Tannehill, and Morna Hooker, Sanders argued that, while juristic categories are undoubtedly present in Paul's thought, the notion of participation in Christ or in his death is "the heart of his soteriology and Christology," and that the "real bite of his theology lies in the participatory categories...."[155] Sanders went so far as to claim that "even the foundation stones of the substitutionary theory—Rom. 8.3f.; II Cor. 5.21; Gal. 3.16 [*sic*]—do not really convey the doctrine of redemption by substitution. They are primarily participationist."[156]

Although Sanders did not employ the terminology of ontological participation and transformation explicitly, such a concept is implied in his insistence that Paul spoke of a "real participation in Christ."[157] Sanders rejected the notion of a "magical transfer," yet stressed his conviction that it is "best to understand Paul as saying what he meant and meaning what he said: Christians really are one body and Spirit with Christ...."[158] Other Pauline scholars have employed similar language, claiming that Paul conceived of the relationship between Christ and believers as an "essential unity" or as a "fundamental union" that is "real" or "supernatural."[159] This relationship has even been described as a "real 'physico-hyperphysical' union."[160] Other Pauline scholars have continued to use the language of mysticism, yet understand this in an ontological sense: there is a "mystical fellowship" or a "mysterious personal union" between Christ and believers, as well as a "mystical participation in Christ."[161] In order to insist that in Paul's thought the union with Christ is "real" and should not be understood merely in terms of identifying oneself

153. For a review of the history of this discussion, see L. Gregory Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians* (JSNTSup 78; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 34-70.

154. See my summary of the thought of Bultmann and Karl Barth in Brondos, *Fortress Introduction*, 130-53.

155. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 453, 502.

156. Ibid., 466. Instead of "Gal. 3.16" the text should read "Gal. 3.13."

157. Ibid., 522.

158. Ibid., 522.

159. See respectively Martin Kitchen, *Ephesians* (NTR; New York: Routledge, 1994), 59; Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:334; Hays, *Faith*, 213-15; Otto Semmelroth, "The Christ-Event and Our Salvation," in *Man before God: Toward a Theology of Man. Readings in Theology*, trans. Donald Becker et al. (ed. Denis Burkhard et al.; New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1966), 215.

160. Bloomquist, *Function of Suffering*, 36 (referring to the work of Wilhelm Heitmüller, *Taufe und Abendmahl im Urchristentum*; RV I, 22/23; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1911).

161. See respectively Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:108; Hays, *Faith*, 224; McLean, *Cursed Christ*, 205. E. P. Sanders has recently acknowledged that he chose to speak of "participation" rather than "mysticism" when he wrote *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, even though for him the basic idea was the same: "I accepted the heart of Schweitzer's view; but, since the term *mysticism* was widely misperceived, I substituted *participationism* and called Paul's theology 'participationist eschatology': see *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 434n19, 440n49, 453-63, 549, and elsewhere" (*Comparing Judaism and Christianity: Common Judaism, Paul, and the Inner and Outer in the Study of Religion*; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016, 263, n37).

with Christ, many scholars have stressed that what is involved is more than an *imitatio Christi*.[162]

In addition to speaking of participation in Christ, scholars have used a wide variety of other terms and phrases to characterize Paul's concept of the relationship between Christ and other human beings. It is said that Paul thought of Christ as a "corporate or inclusive person": "the inclusive unity which the Christians enter is Christ himself.... They form one person because they are included in Christ."[163] Believers participate in Christ's "inclusive humanity" and also in his body, which is an "inclusive body."[164] Paul supposedly even conceived of Christ as a "universal person."[165] For Paul, just as all human beings are related to Adam, so Christ is in "solidarity" with humankind as a whole.[166] The "incorporation into Christ" that takes place through faith, baptism, and the Lord's Supper involves "being mystically incorporated into Christ."[167] Some even speak of Christ as constituting a "power centre," a "power field," or a "field of force."[168]

According to most New Testament scholars, Paul taught that believers participate not only in Christ as a *person* but also in his death and resurrection as *events*. For Paul, those who are "in Christ" participate in Christ's sufferings,[169] in his death and resurrection,[170] and in the "Christ-event."[171] Christ's death and resurrection are therefore "inclusive events, involving a corporate entity."[172] Hooker attributes to Paul the notion of a "mutual participation" that involves an "interchange of experience" in which believers "share in Christ's experience."[173] The notion of "inclusive place-taking" (*inkludierende Stellvertretung*) is similarly understood in terms of a relationship with Christ in which "Christ has not simply come alongside the sinner in order to take away something—namely, guilt and sin; he has rather become identical with

162. See, for example, Rudolf K. Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 24; Lambrecht, "Nekrosis," 328; Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:108; Hooker, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," *NTS* 35 (1989): 339; Robert C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology* (BZNW 32; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1967), 100.

163. Tannehill, *Dying*, 20, 22. See also the discussion in Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:424-29.

164. Ian G. Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions* (SNTSMS 84; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 125, 143, 217; Tannehill, *Dying*, 48.

165. R. Martin, *Reconciliation*, 103.

166. Morna D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 27; B. Martin, *Christ*, 73; Wedderburn, *Baptism*, 352.

167. See respectively Fung, *Galatians*, 274; Hooker, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," 335; McLean, *Cursed Christ*, 201.

168. Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity*, 64; Tannehill, *Dying*, 19; Hays, *Faith*, xxxi; Sam K. Williams, "Again *Pistis Christou*," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 440-41, 443.

169. See, for example, Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 405-6; Bultmann, *Second Corinthians*, 24.

170. See, for example, McKnight, *Jesus*, 351, 353; Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity*, 29; B. Martin, *Christ*, 156; Tannehill, *Dying*, 21-24; Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 332-35.

171. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 95.

172. Tannehill, *Dying*, 123; see also 27, 30, 40, 52, 64, 70, 71.

173. Hooker, *Adam*, 4, 15-17, 26, 34, 40-45. See also Wright, *Climax*, 51-55.

the sinner...."[174] The idea that what is "true of Christ" is "true of all" is repeatedly attributed to Paul as well.[175]

Following Sanders, it has become customary to use the term "transfer" in order to communicate a number of these ideas. Some speak of sin, its curse, or its consequences being transferred from believers to Christ.[176] Wright refers to a "transfer of attributes" between Christ and believers.[177] More commonly, however, Pauline interpreters speak of human beings themselves as being transferred from one realm or sphere into another. Believers in particular are transferred into a "new 'order of being'" or into "a new eschatological reality in Christ."[178] For many scholars, this involves the transfer of believers from one lordship, dominion, or sphere into another under Christ's rule.[179] By virtue of their union with Christ's death and resurrection, they die with Christ to the old age or aeon so as to enter into a new one.[180]

Behind the frequent use of the vocabulary of "transfer" among Pauline scholars to characterize Paul's soteriological thought seems to be a concern for the Protestant teaching that the salvation that believers receive is due, not to anything they have done or must do, but to God's activity alone. Because Protestant theology has stressed so strongly the idea that salvation is by faith alone apart from any works on behalf of believers, Protestant interpreters of Paul have generally insisted that Paul's language regarding suffering and dying with Christ and being crucified with him must be understood in a *passive* sense as involving something done *to* believers rather than something they actively do themselves. From this Protestant perspective, to claim that for Paul the salvation of believers depends on their consciously and intentionally suffering, dying, and being crucified with Christ would involve salvation by works. Because those who are "transferred" from one place to another have something done *to* them rather than actively doing something themselves, the vocabulary of "transfer" enables Protestant biblical scholars to avoid ascribing to Paul the idea that believers save themselves by bringing themselves to participate in Christ or in his death by putting away their sin or old nature

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174. Bailey, "Concepts," 243 (translating a selection from Otfried Hofius, "Das vierte Gottesknechtslied in den Briefen des Neuen Testamentes," *NTS* 39 [1993]: 416).

175. Wright, *Climax*, 48; Dunn, "Paul's Understanding," 40; Tannehill, *Dying*, 25; Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity*, 52; Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought* (SNTSMS 119; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 125.

176. See, for example, Martyn, *Galatians*, 18; McLean, *Cursed Christ*, 124, 205.

177. Wright, *Climax*, 48.

178. Tannehill, *Dying*, 8; Corneliu Constantineanu, *The Social Significance of Reconciliation in Paul's Theology: Narrative Readings in Romans* (LNTS 421; London: T & T Clark, 2010), 143.

179. See, for example, Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity*, 96; Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 400; Beker, *Paul*, 261; Tannehill, *Dying*, 21; Morna D. Hooker, "Paul and Covenantal Nomism," in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C. K. Barrett* (ed. Hooker and S. G. Wilson; London: SPCK, 1982), 53; McKnight, *Jesus*, 350; Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (ed. Daniel J. Harrington; SP 9; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 103; Williams, "Again," 443.

180. See, for example, Raymond Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth: The Social Significance of the Death of Jesus* (JSNTSup 143; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 111; Beker, *Paul*, 272; Tannehill, *Dying*, 70; Hultgren, *Christ*, 38-39; David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul's Concept of Salvation* (JSNTSup 28; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 147.

through their own efforts in order to live differently. The ontological change occurring in believers is thus not the result of anything *they* have done, but only of what God has done in Christ *for* them, *to* them, and *in* them.

New Testament scholars seem to be divided on the question of whether the union between Christ and others should be understood as embracing *all people* or only *believers*. In some cases, scholars seem to affirm both ideas simultaneously, either because they are unaware of the problems involved in doing so, or because they claim that this contradiction lies beyond the scope of biblical scholarship, which does not attempt to resolve the theological problems raised in Scripture. Of course, this is to presuppose that Paul himself affirmed both of these ideas at the same time.

The notion that *all people* are united to Christ or participate in him and the events of his death and resurrection is generally based on the concept of a common human nature in which all human beings share. This idea goes back at least to the time of the church fathers, whom some scholars even cite explicitly in support of this interpretation of Paul.[181] There can be little doubt that the fathers were influenced by Platonic thought in this regard, in particular the way in which Plato related the many to the one through his doctrine of ideas or forms. When applied to human beings, this doctrine affirms that all human beings participate or share in the universal idea of "man," so that the word "man" can be used to refer not only to all human beings collectively, but also to the human nature in which all share. In this latter sense, all human beings *participate* in "man" rather than merely *constituting* "man." In Plato's thought, this universal "man" was not merely an abstract idea but an actual reality. In fact, for Plato, because the ideas were eternal and unchangeable, they were more real than the particulars that participated in them.[182] In recent years, the desire to use inclusive language has greatly complicated attempts to communicate this idea since, unlike the word "man," terms like "humanity," "human," or "human being" cannot be used to refer simultaneously to a single person, to human beings collectively, and to a common nature in which all share.

Whether this reality in which all share is referred to as "man," "humanity," or "human nature," it is regarded as existing in a fallen state under the powers of sin and death. Now that Christ has come to participate in it by virtue of his incarnation and has transformed it through his death and resurrection, however, this shared reality is delivered and liberated from the malevolent powers to which it was subject. In this way, all human beings are delivered and liberated from those powers as well, since by nature they participate in that shared reality. Rather than speaking of Christ participating in the same humanity or nature common to all human beings, some theologians regard Christ himself as the "universal man" or the human being in which all others

181. See, for example, Dunn, who when discussing Jesus' solidarity with all human beings attributes to Paul the "theological logic" of Gregory of Nazianzus, Irenaeus, and Athanasius (*Theology of Paul*, 203-4).

182. On Plato's theory of ideas or forms as well as his use of "participatory" language, see especially Paul Friedländer, *Plato*, Vol. 3: *The Dialogues, Second and Third Periods*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 198-217; David Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 226-33.

share or participate. In this way, their old being or old person is replaced by a new being or new person, who is Christ himself. This is equivalent to identifying Christ with the Platonic form or idea of "man."

On the basis of these ideas, Paul is said to have thought that "all humanity is encapsulated in that one man," that is, Christ.[183] Because Christ is the "eschatological representative of humanity," when he died, "humanity died."[184] Similarly, it is claimed that "Christ's death and resurrection are facts which contain a comprehensive reality that affects the whole of humanity."[185] "In the death of Christ, all men did really undergo the death of their sinful selves: this 'death' was an objective reality.... Paul conceives of Christ's representative function in such strong terms that the whole of humanity was really included in his death."[186] According to this reading of Paul, in 2 Cor. 5:14 he "implies that Christ's death includes the whole of humankind."[187]

For those who interpret Paul's thought in this way, what is now necessary is not that people come to be united to Christ, since that is already the case independently of whether or not one believes it to be true. Rather, through faith in Christ, people must become conscious of what has already happened to them and to humanity as a whole by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection. Thus the rite of baptism, for example, does not actually unite people to Christ but serves as a recognition of the fact that they were *already* united to him in his death and resurrection: "their baptism signified, pointed to the fact, that they were already 'with' him in his past and resurrection."[188] "[B]aptism is the acknowledgment that Christ's death and its salvific implications encompass—and always have done—the person baptized."[189] In this case, "baptism will be understood only as proclamation, thanks, and praise of that which has already occurred in Christ and was also appropriated...."[190] The influence of Karl Barth's thought is readily evident here.

As noted above, the word *body* can be used similarly to refer to a collective entity embracing all people, now assumed and transformed through Christ. Tannehill, for example, understands the allusions to the destruction of the "body of sin" in Rom. 6:6 and the putting away of the "body of flesh" in Col. 2:11 as something that took place in the humanity shared by all people. Tannehill interprets the condemnation of "sin in the flesh" in Rom. 8:3 and the taking off of the old person and putting on of the new in Col. 3:9-10 in

183. Bruce, *Colossians*, 284.

184. Matera, *II Corinthians*, 134.

185. Wedderburn, *Baptism*, 67 (citing Paul Althaus, *Der Brief an die Römer*; NTD 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949, 55).

186. Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:410 (summarizing the thought of Hans Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*; ed. Georg Strecker; KKNT 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970, 182-83, and Gerhard Delling, "Der Tod Jesu in der Verkündigung des Paulus," in *Apophoreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*; ed. Walther Eltester and Franz Heinrich Kettler; BZNW 30; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964, 91, 94).

187. Breytenbach, "'For Us' Phrases," 180.

188. Wedderburn, *Baptism*, 347.

189. Wallis, *Faith*, 126.

190. Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Astrid B. Beck (AB 34B; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 369.

the same terms. For Tannehill, when Paul speaks of the "crucifixion of 'our old man' with Christ" and the "destruction of the 'body of sin'," he is not referring "to the 'old man' and 'body' of each individual, but to a collective entity which is destroyed in the death of Christ.... [T]his body is at the same time the body which died on the cross and a corporate body in which believers were included.... Thus this old man and new man are corporate figures, related to the idea of Christ as a corporate person...."[191] According to Tannehill, like Adam, for Paul Christ is "a figure who determines the existence of the many because they share in his nature, so that what is true of the one is true of the many."[192]

The idea of participation in Christ and his sufferings, death, and resurrection can alternatively be understood as involving a *personal* relationship. In this case, it is not all human beings but only *believers* who participate in Christ and in his death and resurrection.

Ziesler, for example, speaks of a "faith-participation in the saving death and resurrection of Jesus."[193] Wedderburn, citing G. Otto, writes: "What happened to Christ happened to all with him who ever are or will be Christians."[194] Here only believers participate in the Christ-event. Other Pauline scholars stress that it is not merely through faith that this participation takes place but also through baptism and the Eucharist. According to Eduard Lohse, it is "in baptism in which the Christian is taken up into the death and resurrection of Christ."[195] Cilliers Breytenbach similarly affirms: "The baptism of believers is their integration into the body of Christ.... Through the Lord's Supper believers experience participation (*koinōnia*) in the body of the crucified. Baptism and the Lord's Supper integrate those who are baptized and remember the death of the Lord into his body and end their old existence."[196] According to many scholars, this is what Paul meant when he spoke of being "in Christ": "To be 'in Christ' is to have become incorporated through baptism into the community which is the body of Christ.... Christ is, after all, seen by Paul as an 'inclusive' or 'corporate' person.... Believers are included 'within' Christ's being so that his death and resurrection become theirs...."[197]

Many scholars attempt to maintain simultaneously that in Paul's thought *all* people are in some sense joined to Christ and his death and resurrection and that only *believers* participate in such a union. Dunn, for example, writes that for Paul "Jesus' death is the death of all humanity.... The death of the one is the death of the all." Nevertheless human beings must still "in faith identify

191. Tannehill, *Dying*, 24-25.

192. Ibid., 25; cf. 36, 46-47.

193. Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity*, 29. See also Fung, *Galatians*, 274.

194. Wedderburn, *Baptism*, 351 (quoting G. Otto, *Die mit σύν verbundenen Formulierungen im paulinischem Schriftum*; Dissertation; Berlin: Universität Berlin, 1952, 40).

195. Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, trans. William R. Poehlmann and Robert J. Karris (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 104-5.

196. Breytenbach, "'For Us' Phrases," 181.

197. Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:425-26.

themselves with Christ" for Christ's death to have this significance.[198] "[F]or those who find in Christ's death the answer to sin and death, who identify with him in his death, there is the prospect of sharing with him also in his resurrection beyond death."[199]

Although physical views of Christ's work are generally seen as constituting an alternative to penal substitution interpretations, it is also common to attempt to combine the two. This involves affirming both that Christ died *in the stead* of believers and also that they die *with* Christ. Wright, for example, writes: "'Participation' does not of itself exclude 'substitution', however frequently that spurious 'either-or' is asserted."[200] The problem with affirming these two concepts simultaneously is that, according to a substitutionary understanding, believers *do not* die because Christ died in their place, while in a participatory view, sinful believers *do* in fact die *together with* Christ. One could, of course, argue that both of these things are true, yet this would involve changing the sense in which the words *participation* and *substitution* are used. Furthermore, if believers are said to be saved and forgiven on the basis of Christ's substitutionary death, it is not clear why they should also need to be united to Christ or participate in his death and resurrection. This participation would contribute nothing further to their salvation. However, if salvation is instead said to depend on their being united with Christ and his death and resurrection, then it is this participation rather than Christ's substitutionary death that constitutes the basis upon which God forgives them and declares them righteous.

Many biblical scholars claim that Paul spoke not only of *believers* being ontologically transformed through Christ and his death and resurrection but the *entire created order* as well. Beker, for example, claims that in Paul's thought Christ's death and resurrection are "cosmic-ontological events" that effected the transformation of the cosmos *as a whole*.[201] For Victor Furnish, when Paul affirmed that in Christ there is a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), he had in mind "an ontic reality which transcends the new being of individual believers."[202] Joseph Fitzmyer claims that "Paul sees reconciliation as having not merely an anthropological dimension, but also a cosmic dimension; it affects not only the relation of human beings to God, but also that of the created universe."[203] According to Raymond Pickett, central to Paul's thought is his concept of "the objective transformation of reality effected by Christ's death."[204] Lohse affirms that in Colossians Paul teaches that "[t]he universe has been reconciled in that heaven and earth have been brought back

198. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 210-11.

199. Ibid., 233. See also 223, 268, 329, 372; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 182, 439-40.

200. Wright, *Climax*, 153, n54.

201. Beker, *Paul*, 196.

202. Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (AB 32A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 332.

203. Fitzmyer, *To Advance*, 169.

204. Pickett, *Cross*, 157.

into their divinely created and determined order through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. Now the universe is again under its head and thereby cosmic peace has returned."[205]

Often the language of apocalyptic is used in connection with these ideas. Beker, for example, claims that "Paul interprets the death and resurrection of Christ primarily in terms of a cosmic-apocalyptic judgment and renewal. Just as in Christ's death the powers of sin, the law, the flesh, and death are judged, so in Christ's resurrection the 'new creation' emerges."[206] These "ontological powers that determine the human situation within the context of God's created order" are for Paul "major apocalyptic forces."[207] Elsewhere Beker speaks of Christ's resurrection as "ontological-apocalyptic" in nature and claimed that it "has inaugurated a new ontological reality...."[208] "Because the resurrection is an apocalyptic-cosmic event that inaugurates the cosmic triumph of God, it draws the death of Christ into its apocalyptic orbit."[209]

Nevertheless, as this last quote makes clear, many scholars claim that Paul conceived of the ontological transformation of reality brought about by Christ as something that is not yet complete. According to Beker, while "the cross is God's judgment of the world," the resurrection is only "the *beginning* of the ontological renewal of creation that will come to completion in God's new age."[210] Beker uses the word "proleptic" to describe this: Christ's resurrection "is a proleptic event that inaugurates the new creation."[211] He also points to Oscar Cullmann's "analogy of D-day and V-day of World War II" to illustrate the tension between the "already" and the "not yet." Citing A. M. Hunter, he writes: "though the campaign may drag on and V-day, the day of final glory may still be out of sight, D-day is over and the powers of evil have received a blow from which they can never recover."[212]

Similar ideas are found in the writings of other scholars, who also distinguish between the "already" and the "not yet" in Paul's thought. Tannehill writes: "The decisive event has already taken place, an event which Paul understood in eschatological terms. Nevertheless, the old world continues to exist and to exercise a certain power.... The new world is already present, but it is hidden within the old...."[213] Like Beker, many use the term *proleptic* to describe this reality: "cosmic peace (*shalom*) and salvation have been *proleptically* manifested in Christ."[214] It has also become common to claim that

205. Lohse, *Colossians*, 59.

206. Beker, *Paul*, 204.

207. Ibid., 189.

208. Ibid., 196.

209. Ibid., 189.

210. Ibid., 211 (emphasis added).

211. Ibid., 159.

212. Ibid., 159 (the citation is from Archibald M. Hunter, *Interpreting Paul's Gospel*; London: SCM, 1954, 127).

213. Tannehill, *Dying*, 75, 78; see also 127.

214. Garlington, *Faith*, 76. See also Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (WUNT 81; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995), 343.

Paul thought in terms of an "inaugurated eschatology" rather than a "realized eschatology." According to Allison, the latter phrase mistakenly "implies fulfillment without remainder.... The earliest Christian preaching contained an 'already' that by no means excluded a 'not yet.' In fact, the two went hand in hand."[215] Because believers are united to Christ and he has died and risen, however, they can have full certainty that this ontological transformation will ultimately reach its goal: "[A]ccording to Paul [Christ's] resurrection guarantees the final resurrection of Christians as well.... His resurrection not only stands to guarantee a future general resurrection, but it also marks the beginning of the age to come in advance of its final consummation."[216]

Theological Problems and Presuppositions

The physical interpretations of Christ's saving work just outlined are based on a number of premises that are not usually made explicit among those who attribute those interpretations to Paul and other authors of the New Testament writings. Here I will discuss five of the most important of these.

Premise 1: Powers such as sin and death are ontological in nature and as such can be dealt with in much the same way that ontological realities or substances are dealt with in the physical world.

Dunn's interpretation of the work of Christ provides an excellent example of this premise. By conceiving of sin as some type of malignant cancer, poison, or virus, he presupposes that the problem of sin can be addressed in the same way that medicines or vaccines are introduced into the body in order to reverse or alter certain biological, chemical, or physical processes.[217] Because of Christ's divine nature, union with Christ or participation in his death and resurrection then becomes the means by which human beings or the entire created order are delivered from the malevolent powers or substances to which they have been subjected.

These ideas are reflected in the language that proponents of physical views of Christ's work often use. For God to "absorb," "exhaust," or "neutralize" the power of sin and death in human beings involves reversing *natural consequences*, the "cause-and-effect" mechanisms that are at work in the world or in human nature. On this basis, many biblical scholars speak of salvation in Christ as involving some type of "mechanics" or "mechanism" and inquire as to how Christ's death and resurrection "work" to produce their salvific "effects."[218]

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215. Dale C. Allison Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 150.

216. Bruce A. Lowe, "Oh διά! How is Romans 4:25 to be Understood?," *JTS* 57 (2006): 153. See also C. E. Hill, "Paul's Understanding of Christ's Kingdom in 1 Cor. 15:20-28," *NovT* 30 (1988): 303-6.

217. See, for example, Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 214-15: "The imagery is more of the removal of a corrosive stain or the neutralization of a life-threatening virus than of anger appeased by punishment." See also ibid., 223; Dunn, "Paul's Understanding," 50; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 182, 372, 439, 442; Martyn, *Galatians*, 318.

218. See, for example, Constantineanu, *Social Significance*, 110, 143; Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 218; Campbell, *Quest*, 60; Stephen Finlan, *The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors* (AcBib 19; Atlanta: SBL, 2004), 190; R. Martin, *Reconciliation*, 98; McKnight, *Jesus*, 346.

Other scholars use mechanistic language to describe what takes place in Christ: "God's resurrection of Jesus from the dead not only frees Jesus Christ from the powers, but it *sets in motion* the defeat of Sin and Death...."[219] Jesus' death serves to "*trigger* the general resurrection,"[220] while "the beginning of new creation... has been *triggered* by the resurrection of God's crucified Son."[221] To set something in motion or trigger something is to initiate a series of cause-and-effect reactions that follow one upon another automatically and mechanically.

According to these ideas, Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection were necessary to alter the laws of nature in some way or to overpower or extirpate some maleficent ontological forces from the world or from the nature in which all human beings share. Salvation seems to be understood almost as some type of genetic mutation in the human makeup or the result of a change in the molecular structure of reality or the cosmos. The ontological alteration of the universe or of the human condition that supposedly took place as a consequence of humanity's fall into sin is reversed by Christ so that human nature or nature as a whole is now healed and restored to harmony and order. According to Hooker, for example, "Paul represents redemption in Christ as a radical restructuring of human nature...."[222] Similarly, Hays attributes to Paul the idea that "Jesus' death terminates the old age and ushers in a new one, in such a way that the very structure of reality is transformed."[223]

Proponents of this type of explanation often view divinity itself as some type of power or substance that is capable of transforming human nature or the nature of the world. The introduction of the divine substance or essence into human nature or the world acts like leaven introduced into bread dough to make it rise.[224] On this basis, it is argued that it was necessary for Christ to be both fully divine and fully human: only the power of the divinity was capable of bringing about the ontological transformation or healing necessary for salvation. In order for that power to be introduced into the world, it was necessary for the divine to become human in Christ.

When humanity or human nature is conceived of as some type of ontological reality that is present in all human beings or in which all share, defining precisely how each individual human being relates to this common humanity is highly problematic. How exactly does the physical interconnectedness

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219. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Interpreting the Death of Jesus Apocalyptically: Reconsidering Romans 8:32," in *Jesus and Paul Reconnected: Fresh Pathways into an Old Debate* (ed. Todd D. Still; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 139 (emphasis added).

220. McKnight, *Jesus*, 361 (emphasis added).

221. Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (PCC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 222.

222. Hooker, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," 338.

223. Hays, "Crucified," 239. See also Jens Schröter, *Der Versöhnte Versöhner: Paulus als unentbehrlicher Mittler im Heilsvorgang zwischen Gott und Gemeinde nach 2 Kor 2,14—7,4* (TANT 10; Tübingen: Francke, 1993), 286. There Schröter argues that *kainē ktisis* should be understood in an ontological sense and claims that for Paul "mit dem Tod Christi der alte Äon untergegangen ist und eine den ganzen Kosmos betreffende Erneuerung stattgefunden hat."

224. For this interpretation of Paul's thought, see Nonna Verna Harrison, "Theosis as Salvation: An Orthodox Perspective," *ProEccl* 6 (1997): 436.

between human beings work? Did Paul, for example, think that Adam as the progenitor of all human beings had been infected with some substance or power that he then passed down to all his descendants? When Christ is compared to Adam in this regard, it is not clear how all human beings can be affected by the transformation brought about in Christ's own humanity, since human beings do not descend physically from Christ as they do from Adam. Therefore some other ontological link must be posited between Christ's humanity and that of the rest of human beings so that what takes place in him can produce some "effect" in all others as well. Christ's work is then defined in terms of bringing into existence some type of ontologically transformed humanity in which others can participate.

Similar affirmations can be made regarding the notion that Christ has delivered fallen human beings from the personal demonic powers to which they were subject. Christ's entrance into the realm in which those forces are at work effects an ontological change in the cosmos by neutralizing those forces or hindering them from affecting human beings in the ways that they did previously by virtue of the superior divine power that he possesses.

The way in which sin and death are thought to relate to one another is also problematic in physical views of redemption. If death is said to be the natural consequence of sin, once human beings are freed from the power of sin, it would seem that they are thereby automatically delivered from death as well. However, death or mortality can also be seen as an ontological substance, reality, or power present in human nature that is dealt with directly through Christ's assumption of human nature and the transformation of that nature effected through his death and resurrection. In this case, it would appear that human beings can be saved from the power of death without necessarily being delivered from the power of sin, which may remain present in human nature or the world. This is true whether sin and death are thought to be brought about by forces of evil that are impersonal or personal.

The relation between the salvation of human beings and that of the world or cosmos also raises difficulties in physical views of Christ's work. Precisely how does the ontological transformation of human beings affect the cosmos? Or, conversely, how does the ontological transformation of the cosmos affect human beings? Furthermore, when the ontological transformation occurring in Christ is said to result in the ontological transformation of the cosmos and of human beings, the question then becomes how Christ relates ontologically both to the cosmos and to human beings. How is one to understand, for example, the affirmation that in Paul's thought "[t]he redemption that is in Christ Jesus is a cosmic redemption; its healing virtue streams out to the farthest bounds of creation"?[225] How does what happened in Christ affect everything or everyone else? Clearly, some type of ontological link must be posited between Christ and the rest of reality.

225. Bruce, *Colossians*, 113.

Proponents of physical views of Christ's work generally claim that the ontological transformation effected by Christ brings about an ethical renewal of human beings as its consequence.[226] Once delivered from the the personal or impersonal forces of evil that exerted their malicious influence over them, human beings are now able to live differently. The evil inclination in human hearts is overcome or substantially weakened so that now human beings are able to do good. This, however, raises the question of whether their salvation from death is to be attributed directly to the ontological transformation that has taken place in them or instead to the change in their conduct to which that ontological transformation leads. In the former case, they are saved from death, not because their conduct is now acceptable to God, but because their being or nature has been ontologically transformed so as to be freed from the power of death. In the latter case, however, a forensic component is added to the equation. On the basis of the ethical transformation that takes place in those who have been transformed ontologically, God forgives them their sins, declares them righteous, and saves them from death. In this case, the ontological transformation effected by Christ does not in itself effect the salvation of human beings, but merely makes it possible for them to undergo an ethical transformation on the basis of which God then acts to save them.

Premise 2: It was not possible for human beings, human nature, or the nature of the created order to be transformed ontologically or delivered from the powers to which they were subject without Christ's incarnation, life, death, and resurrection.

Physical understandings of God's work in Christ generally posit the necessity of Christ's coming, death, and resurrection in order for humanity and the world to be saved. They can only posit this necessity, however, by claiming that it was impossible for the ontological transformation of the cosmos or human nature to take place without such a transformation taking place first in Christ.

Thus, for example, Dunn argues, "Sinful flesh could be dealt with only by killing it. The power of sin could exhaust itself only in death. Jesus' death embodied and enacted that fact."[227] Elsewhere he writes: "God *could only* deal with the problem of 'sinful flesh' by sending his Son in complete solidarity and identity with humankind in its existence under the powers of sin and death.... This evidently, so far as Paul was concerned, was *the only way* God could deal with the power of sin and death. The sentence of death on the infected portion of humanity was the means to life for the rest of humanity."[228] Here it is clear that the only way in which sin and death could be overcome in humanity as a whole was for them to be overcome or "killed" first in Christ's own

226. See, for example, Charles Talbert, "Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists," *CBQ* 63 (2001): 20-22. There Talbert comments that for Paul the ontological transformation of the believer is "divine empowerment" that leads to obedience. Similarly, McKnight affirms that, in Pauline theology, "the death of Christ rescues by a co-crucifixion and co-resurrection that lead to behavioral change and to life" (*Jesus*, 353).

227. Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 318.

228. Ibid., 202-3, 223 (emphasis added).

humanity. Similarly, Scroggs' affirmation that "Christ not only is true humanity; he also mediates this true humanity to the believer"[229] presupposes that the "true humanity" had to be brought about first in Christ. Only then could Christ mediate this same new, true humanity to others.

But why was this the case? Why God could not just bring about in humanity or the world the type of ontological transformation that was needed *independently* of Christ? Could not God have simply destroyed the malevolent powers holding humanity in bondage or have eradicated the power of sin and evil in the world or in human nature by *fiat*?[230] Why could God not do away with the consequences of human sin without those consequences being "exhausted" first by being "absorbed" by Christ in his death? There simply seems to be no basis for claiming that the curse pronounced by God's law on sinners "could only be thrown off by Christ offering himself as a substitutionary victim."[231] Why was it not possible for God simply to remove the curse present in human nature by an act of divine power, *without* Christ becoming human and dying?

Once again, biblical scholars rarely address these kinds of questions. They merely ascribe such ideas to Paul and excuse themselves from dealing with the theological problems involved by claiming that they are not theologians but biblical scholars, and therefore that such problems lie outside the realm of their discipline. In so doing, they lay the theological mess at the feet of Paul, as if he were to blame, refusing to recognize that in reality it is not Paul but they who have created the mess by reading all kinds of ideas foreign to Paul's thought back into his writings.

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229. Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 92, 98, 99,102.

230. Traditionally, three arguments have been used to answer the question of why God could not have delivered humanity from evil by *fiat*. The first is of an *ontological* nature. This argument may take the form of affirming that fallen human nature or the cosmos was incapable of receiving the divine power that needed to be transfused into it because the latter was so great in strength that it would overpower or overwhelm humanity or creation in some way. This argument goes back to Irenaeus of Lyons, who claimed that in Christ humanity needed to be gradually accustomed to its union with divinity, as we shall see in Chapter 18. The problem with such an argument is that salvation is essentially conceived of in terms of bringing together two different substances, the divine and human, and making the human compatible with the divine. God's work in Christ is then in effect to bring about some type of physical, biological, or chemical transformation in human nature or the world. A second argument involves claiming that the ontological transformation necessary in human beings had to be effected first in Christ because that ontological transformation had to be preceded by a proper ethical response, and Christ alone was capable of making such a response. This argument is found in the doctrine of the Council of Trent as well as in Protestant thought: in order for God to infuse the grace needed or pour out the Holy Spirit on human beings, Christ needed to *merit* such a gift on their behalf through his death. A third argument looks to forensic ideas of justice to claim that it would have been *unjust* for God to bring about the ontological transformation necessary for human salvation by *fiat*. As noted previously, some of the church fathers claimed that God had to respect the devil's rights in rescuing human beings from his power and thus had to offer the devil his Son in exchange for the release of human beings. All of these arguments are problematic and seem to provide no satisfactory or convincing answer as to why God could not simply have brought about by *fiat* the ontological transformation required in human beings in order for them to be saved without first bringing that transformation about in Christ.

231. McLean, *Cursed Christ*, 201.

Premise 3: Before the ontological transformation of humanity or the world could be brought about in its eschatological fullness, it was necessary to bring it about in part in the present time.

This idea is closely related to the previous point. The stress here, however, is on the notion that the *full and definitive* transformation of human beings and the cosmos that is generally associated with the *eschaton* must be preceded by a *partial* transformation. The argument for the *necessity* of this partial transformation prior to the final one is not generally made explicitly, but instead tends to be simply assumed.

In both ancient Judaism and early Christianity, those who envisioned an ontological transformation of human beings and the created order generally regarded it as something that would take place at the *eschaton*, when the promised new age of salvation would arrive. The early Christian proclamation also appears to have asserted that some type of ontological transformation had already taken place in Christ's own body when he was raised from the dead. Physical views of Christ's work, however, take the further step of claiming that the ontological transformation that took place in Christ when he was raised affected not only him but others as well. They therefore posit some type of partial or inaugurated transformation in human nature or the nature of the created order that must still come fully to completion and perfection, as we have noted above.[232]

One image commonly employed by Pauline scholars to characterize Paul's understanding of the new reality brought about by Christ through his death and resurrection is that of the dawn of a new age. "Through his death and resurrection, the eschatological age of salvation has begun to dawn."[233] "[T]he new covenant of the future has already been inaugurated in Christ and the final salvation and judgment have already begun.... It is the proleptic dawning of the new age itself.... What distinguishes Paul's thought is his conviction that the new age has already begun in Christ...."[234] Nevertheless, while "[t]he New Creation *has dawned*," there are "still battles to be fought...."[235] Thus more still needs to be done.

Language of the new age "breaking in" or being "ushered in" by Christ is also common: "Christ ushered in the new era at the 'turn of the ages'...."[236] "The cross, then, is the apocalyptic turning point of history. The breaking-in of the new age means the destruction and judgment of the old age."[237] "The old world has been crucified and new creation has broken in through Jesus's death and resurrection...."[238]

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232. For other allusions to these ideas, see Tannehill, *Dying*, 75, 78; Beker, *Paul*, 149, 211; J. Louis Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *NTS* 31 (1985): 411-12.

233. Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 187. See also Allison, *End*, 65, 80.

234. Hafemann, *Paul*, 343.

235. Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies," 420.

236. R. Martin, *Reconciliation*, 103.

237. Beker, *Paul*, 205.

238. Hays, *Faith*, xxix. See also Hays, "Crucified," 233.

Closely related to this kind of affirmation is the idea that the evil powers or principalities have been defeated in principle, but this defeat must still be completed. As noted above, it is common to maintain that in his death and resurrection Christ won a "decisive victory" over the evil powers, yet the *definitive* victory still lies in the future.[239] "The apocalyptic battle between God and the powers of sin and death has been fought and won at the cross."[240] As Cullmann's analogy of D-day and V-day implies, "the decisive victory has been won but mopping up operations remain."[241]

Such language is problematic for two reasons. First of all, it contradicts our historical reality today, just as much as it contradicted the historical reality of people in the first century. Humanity is just as much subject to sin and death as it was before Christ came. Human nature, like nature in general, remains essentially the same as it has always been. There is no evidence that any type of hidden, mysterious ontological change took place in human beings or the world when Christ died and rose. Nor is there any empirical basis for affirming that human nature has undergone a "radical restructuring" or that "the very structure of reality is transformed" as a result of what has taken place in Christ. One can hardly maintain that the amount of evil in the world suddenly decreased immediately following Christ's death and resurrection. On the contrary, evil remains just as prevalent as it was before. If this is attributed to evil forces in the world, it can hardly be said that their power has been taken away by Christ and their defeat ensured, since those forces continue to win many victories and will ultimately take down a large portion of humanity with them. In that case, all that took place in Christ is that the situation of humanity and the world has been changed from one in which the defeat of the forces of evil *did not* yet exist "in principle" to one in which it now *does* exist "in principle," though not in reality. Of course, the New Testament itself speaks of the defeat of the forces of evil through Christ, yet as I shall argue later on, there is no clear basis there for interpreting this in the sense that the power of evil actually came to an end or was substantially diminished when Christ died and rose.

A second problem with such language is that it implies that the ontological transformation of humanity or the cosmos is something that takes place gradually and progressively. For example, when the initial victory of the Allied forces took place on D-day in Europe during World War II, those forces gradually established themselves over an increasingly greater territory until all of the conquered territories were finally taken back. This involved a series of progressive stages by which Europe eventually was liberated from the Nazi regime and its allies. To use this type of imagery suggests that Christ is now

239. See, for example, Caird, *New Testament*, 119-20; Judith L. Kovacs, "'Now Shall the Ruler of this World be Driven Out': Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20-36," *JBL* 114 (1995): 229, 246; John M. G. Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon* (NTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 85.

240. Normand Bonneau, "The Logic of Paul's Argument on the Curse of the Law in Galatians 3:10-14," *NovT* 39 (1997): 69.

241. B. Martin, *Christ*, 108.

slowly imposing his reign over the world in the way that the Allied forces did over Europe.

Such a gradual process over time is also implied by the image of a new age "dawning." Dawn is a stage following upon the darkness of night and preceding the full brightness of daytime, which inevitably follows. To maintain that a new age has dawned implies that gradually this new age will grow in intensity and develop into its fullness over time, as if a promised utopia is to become a historical reality little by little. In fact, the way in which many interpreters speak of the new age having "dawned" implies that we have now been stuck at dawn for centuries without advancing any further, as if the earth had stopped turning. Few biblical scholars would admit openly that such an understanding of the gradual arrival of the new age is found in the New Testament in general and the Pauline writings in particular. Nevertheless, scholars continue to use such language widely and uncritically, seemingly oblivious to the theological and historical problems it involves.

The concern of many scholars in all of this is to claim that, as a result of Christ's death and resurrection, something has actually happened to the world and to humanity. The "Christ-event" must have "effected" some type of real, ontological change in reality in some way; otherwise, it would appear that Christ's coming, death, and resurrection constituted isolated events that had no major impact on human beings or the created order. For many, this would involve minimizing or denying the universal significance of what took place in Christ and call into question the idea that something new has come into existence as a result of Christ's incarnation, life, death, and resurrection.

Premise 4: Although all human beings have been ontologically transformed or united to Christ, each individual must come to faith in order to be saved.

Physical interpretations of Christ's work raise the same problem mentioned previously with regard to penal substitution views: they affirm on the one hand that *all human beings* have been saved objectively, while on the other hand they maintain that salvation depends on the subjective response of human beings to what God has done in Christ.

If it were truly the case that through Christ humanity as a whole has been liberated from its subjection to the forces that held all in bondage, so that "evil has already been judged and cast out" and "sin's power has been eradicated in Christ,"[242] then all people would automatically be saved, independently of any response on their part to what God has done in Christ. Nothing more would be required of anyone. However, once it is maintained that some human response such as faith or a transformed life is necessary in order to be saved, then the affirmation that all human beings have been

242. Beker, *Paul*, 215, 219; Allison, *End*, 54 (commenting on John 12:31). For other examples of these ideas, see Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (AB 34; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 1:235; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 126; Martyn, *Galatians*, 326; Matera, *II Corinthians*, 133-34; Beker, *Paul*, 193.

saved through Christ must be qualified in some way. Generally, this is done by affirming that all people have been saved "potentially" or "in principle," but end up being *actually* saved only if they come to faith. What Christ has done merely makes their salvation *possible*: "when Christ who was a representative or inclusive figure was raised all were *potentially* raised with him...."[243] "The Christ event has *in principle* destroyed 'the flesh,' and engendered the *possibility* of new life for those who themselves allow 'the flesh' to be mortified in their own human life."[244] "Christ's death for their sins made *possible* their deliverance from the evil age, their freedom from the enslaving powers, and their knowledge of the true God.... Christ, in his crucifixion, was himself the object of the law's curse ('Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree,' [Gal. 3:13, citing Deut. 21:23]); thereby he exhausted its force for those otherwise cursed *who believe in him*."[245]

As this last quote makes clear, in this way it is claimed that, even though Christ has conquered the powers that held all of humanity and the world in bondage, ultimately only believers are actually saved: "The representatives of the old age—sin, death, the law, and the flesh—have been overthrown and caused to release their grip on *those who are now in Christ*."[246] "Jesus' lifting up in John 12,20-36 has cosmic-juridical effects.... [T]his decisive judgment and destruction of the cosmic 'ruler' behind the world also amounts to *eschatological* and *soteriological* effects that benefit *those who believe*."[247]

Affirmations of this type are problematic for a couple of reasons. First, it simply makes no sense to claim that all human beings have been saved in principle or potentially, but that they must still come to faith in order for that salvation to be actual. One would have to affirm that the only thing that Christ's coming has changed is that human beings have passed from a condition of *not* being saved potentially or in principle into a new condition in which they *are* saved potentially or in principle. Conversely, if a proper response is necessary for one ultimately to be saved, those who *were already* saved by Christ from the forces of evil become *unsaved* if they do not make such a response. In that case, the ontological transformation that took place in the humanity of all is reversed, negated, or undone in those who do not respond properly to it.

The second problem with such affirmations is that, strictly speaking, they attribute human salvation, not to what God has done in Christ, but to the *human response* to what God has done in Christ. Even if through Christ God is said to have delivered all human beings from the powers that held them in

243. Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2010), 215 (emphasis added).

244. Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:337 (referring to the thought of Ehrhard Kamlah, "Wie beurteilt Paulus sein Leiden? Ein Beitrag zur Untersuchung seiner Denkstruktur," *ZNW* 54 [1963]: 230-31; emphasis added).

245. Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 369, 376 (emphasis added). See also Thrall, *2 Corinthians*, 1:424.

246. Garlington, *Faith*, 72 (emphasis added).

247. John Dennis, "The 'Lifting up of the Son of Man' and the Dethroning of the 'Ruler of this World': Jesus' Death as the Defeat of the Devil in John 12,31-32," in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (ed. G. Van Belle; BETL 200; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 680 (emphasis added).

bondage, in reality God ends up delivering from bondage only those human beings who *respond properly* to God. As in a forensic view of Christ's work, if a response of faith is necessary for one to be saved, then ultimately it is not Christ's life, death, and resurrection that effect salvation but one's faith. Salvation is no longer the automatic consequence of what Christ has done but depends on a divine decision to bring about the necessary transformation in those whose faith God regards as sufficient for that purpose. If faith is instead said to effect salvation automatically or mechanically, then faith becomes a necessary cog in the mechanism of salvation or part of a magic formula that "works" only when faith is present. Similarly, when it is claimed that all human beings have been transformed and that Christian baptism is merely a recognition that one has already been saved, the question arises as to whether it is possible for one truly to be saved without ever becoming aware of it or recognizing it.

Premise 5: Although the notion of an ontological participation was clear to people in Paul's day, it is no longer clear to people in ours.

Attempting to define the way in which Paul understood believers to be united to Christ or to participate in his death and resurrection has been highly problematic for biblical scholars. As noted above, Sanders struggled with this question: on the one hand he insisted that this union was "real," yet he rejected not only the idea of a "magical transfer," but also Bultmann's claim that what was involved was merely a "revised self-understanding."[248] He concluded that we "lack a category of 'reality'—real participation in Christ, real possession of the Spirit—which lies between naive cosmological speculation and a revised self-understanding on the other. I must confess that I do not have a new category of perception to propose here. This does not mean, however, that Paul did not have one.... [W]hat Paul concretely thought cannot be directly appropriated by Christians today."[249]

In essence, this involves taking Paul's participatory language *literally* so as to interpret Paul as "saying what he meant and meaning what he said,"[250] yet then affirming that if we take it literally, it is unintelligible today. Other Pauline scholars follow suit. Hays, for example, writes: "How does union [with Christ's death] occur? Unfortunately, this is not as clear as we might wish.... [T]he matter remains mysterious."[251] According to Troels Engberg-Pedersen:

> One feature of Paul's 'theology' *cum* 'cosmology' is an idea of a kind of physical participation in Christ on the part of Christ-believers: they are 'one with' Christ in a manner that was probably understood by Paul in a very reified way. (Fortunately, however, he also understood it in other ways that are more accessible to us.) Now scholars often speak of Paul's idea here as if it made immediate sense and indeed was more or less readily acceptable to us. But it is not. On the contrary, it looks

248. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 522.
249. Ibid., 522-23.
250. Ibid., 522.
251. Hays, "Crucified," 242.

> as if it is very far from constituting a real option for us. That also means, however, that it is very difficult to develop, even as part of doing one's existentially neutral, historical work, what it all meant to Paul. Since it appears so strange to us, one really cannot feel sure that one has got it sufficiently right for it to be possible to develop it further and combine it with other similar ideas. A shared level of discourse is lacking.[252]

Pauline scholars make similar observations regarding other concepts that they attribute to Paul. Among these are the idea of a transfer of sin or the transfer of believers from one realm or aeon to another, the understanding of Christ as constituting some sort of "power field," and the precise manner in which Christ's death and resurrection supposedly brought about an ontological change in humanity or in creation as a whole.

For people of all different times and places to be united to Christ's death and resurrection, it is necessary either to make those events omnipresent in some way or to establish some type of timeless ontological link between all people and the historical event of the cross. Bultmann chose to affirm the first of these alternatives, claiming that for Paul the "cosmic event" of the cross "may no longer be considered as just the historical event of Jesus' crucifixion on Golgotha. For God made this event the eschatological occurrence, so that, lifted out of all temporal limitation, it continues to take place in any present moment, both in the proclaiming word and the sacraments."[253] Otto Semmelroth similarly affirmed that in Paul's thought "the Christ event does not remain bound to the historic past but has been brought into a continuing state of actuality in the presence of the eternal God by Christ's resurrection and ascension...."[254] In contrast, Karl Barth opted for the second alternative, in effect placing all human beings at Golgotha on the cross together with Jesus: "For then and there, in the person of Christ taking our place, we were present, being crucified and dying with him. We died. This has to be understood quite concretely and literally.... We died: the totality of all sinful men and women.... His death was the death of all."[255] For Barth, all human beings died with Christ because they all share in the same humanity or human nature that Christ assumed in the incarnation and put to death on the cross.

One cannot help asking, however, whether it is true that these strange and mystifying concepts that are no longer comprehensible to us in our modern age were perfectly intelligible for people in Paul's day. Have we really become incapable of grasping ideas that people two thousand years ago understood clearly without any difficulties? Or does the real problem lie with modern interpreters who have mistakenly attributed to Paul and the other New

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252. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 27. See also Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 328; Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 409-10.

253. Bultmann, *Theology*, 1:303.

254. Semmelroth, "Christ-Event," 218.

255. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1969), 4/1:295.

Testament writers ideas and notions that would have been just as strange and mystifying to people in antiquity as they are to us today?

REVELATIONAL INTERPRETATIONS OF CHRIST'S WORK IN NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

When Christ's death and resurrection are regarded as salvific by virtue of what they *reveal* to human beings, a seemingly endless list of possibilities exists with regard to the manner in which the content of that revelation is defined. It can be said that for Paul "Jesus' death on the cross reveals the faithfulness, love, and paradoxical power of God,"[256] or that "the purpose of Jesus' life and death, according to John, was to unmask and undo violence.... For John, the serving, self-giving love revealed in Jesus has the *power* to *transform* the believer, and indeed the world, making it whole, completing the creation."[257] The cross can be seen as "the event that discloses the free and sovereign God [and] reveals also that God is deeply and lovingly involved with humanity and humanity's predicament.... The Christian community finds in the crucifixion the clue as to where God is present in the world, where divine grace, albeit in a hidden and mysterious way, is active."[258] Jesus' death can similarly be said to reveal countless other truths regarding God, Christ, humanity, the nature of the world, and our relations both with God and with one another.

Typical of this type of interpretation of Christ's death and resurrection is the work of Robert Hamerton-Kelly, who looked to the thought of René Girard regarding "sacred violence" to interpret Paul's language concerning the salvific nature of Christ's death. Commenting on 1 Cor. 2:6-8, which speaks of the rulers of this age crucifying Christ, he claims that for Paul the "murder of God's son sealed their doom because it revealed with vivid clarity the origin of this world in sacred violence."[259] Thus, according to Hamerton-Kelly, "for Paul the primary saving effect of the Cross is as a disclosure of religious violence, not as a sacrificial transaction that appeases the divine wrath."[260] Hamerton-Kelly can even speak of Christ enduring wrath on the cross, yet not in the sense that proponents of penal substitution views understand such an idea:

> for Paul wrath is not the active divine vengeance but the effects of sacred violence in the human world: The wrath that falls on Christ instead of on humanity is, therefore, human vengeance dissembled through the Sacred and borne with absolute vunerability, with the result that Christ stands out as the one complete victim

256. Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and his Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 135.

257. John Painter, "The Death of Jesus in John: A Discussion of the Tradition History and Theology of John," in *Death of Jesus*, ed. Van Belle, 345-46.

258. Charles B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 181, 183.

259. Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 85.

260. Ibid., 79; see also 76-77, 85, 87, 109.

> and target of the wrath.... He alone eschews all aid from sacred violence and bears the wrath for us, to disclose and thus disarm it.[261]

According to this type of interpretation, the objective of Jesus' death was to bring about an ethical change in human beings. Larry Hurtado, for example, claims that in the New Testament "Jesus' death functions as inspiring and exemplary for Christian behaviour, as descriptive of, and criterion for, Christian existence—indeed as the crucial event by which Christian ethical effort, discipleship, and consequent suffering are defined and given their significance."[262] John Painter comments that, for John, "The cross is God's ultimate appeal and offer of his love to the world. It has the power to transform the consciousness of those who believe, to love one another as God in Jesus has loved the world."[263] This means, of course, that Christ's death does not save *all* people, but only those who respond to it in faith: "The faithfulness of God demonstrated in the faith of Jesus must be met by the human response of faith for the death to be effective."[264]

Like the notion of God's wrath, much of the language and imagery traditionally associated with penal substitution and physical understandings of Christ's work can also be interpreted according to a revelational understanding. For example, rather than understanding the *Christus Victor* idea in a forensic or ontological sense, it can be said that by re-enacting what Christ did, believers can overcome the evil forces that hold human beings in bondage:

> when believers re-enact Jesus' death in their own lives, they are freed from the rule of Sin.... In Romans 6, Paul asserts that believers die with Christ during baptism, i.e. they re-enact his death in their own lives.... By re-enacting Jesus' death in this way, they are transferred from the aeon of Sin to the aeon ruled by him.... When one 'dies with' Christ, even though one does not literally die, one gains liberation from and shares in a victory over the evil tyrant, Sin.[265]

Christ's death and resurrection can also be said to bring about a new age, a new humanity, and a new creation. In this case, however, those events do so by means of the effect they have on human minds and hearts through faith. Ziesler, for example, characterizes Paul's thought thus:

> The life in Christ is the life of faith: to believe is to be in Christ.... To be in Christ is to be in the new Adam, in a solidarity of life, and of righteousness, as against being in 'natural' humanity, the old Adam, in a solidarity of sin and death.... [T]o be in Christ, in the new humanity, is to be in the Church, the embodiment of that humanity.... Being in Christ also involves dying and rising with him. This dying may refer to a previous death *in* sin (Eph. 2.1-5) or to the death of the old self, as death *to* sin, i.e. an entering into Christ's representative action. This leads to a new

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261. Ibid., 81.

262. Larry W. Hurtado, "Jesus' Death as Paradigmatic in the New Testament," *SJT* 57 (2004): 413-14.

263. Painter, "Death," 360.

264. Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 116.

265. Seeley, *Noble Death*, 104, 147-48. See also Tannehill, *Dying*, 124-28.

> life, both ethically and relationally, a risen life which is a new creation, gift as well as demand, imperative as well as indicative....[266]

Of course, according to views such as these, it is not actually Christ's death and resurrection in themselves that bring about a new age, a new humanity, or a new creation, but rather the ethical transformation that takes place in believers as a result of what Christ's death and resurrection have revealed to them.

The language of participation and transfer can also be understood in a purely ethical sense. In this case, rather than being of a forensic or ontological nature, one's union with Christ and participation in his death and resurrection involve a conscious, intentional identification with Christ and those events. According to McKnight, for example, in Matthew's Gospel, "the death of Jesus is *exemplary* and his followers become so by *participation* in his representative death."[267] Hamerton-Kelly agrees with Sanders that Paul had a "participationist soteriology," yet he understands this not ontologically but metaphorically, "in the sense of imaginative participation in the death of Christ.... Paul, therefore, metaphorically describes entering the Christian life as a co-crucifixion and that alone suggests that the metaphor is rooted in his own conversion experience."[268] According to this understanding, to participate in Christ is thus to identify with his story and follow the model he laid down in his life and death:

> God's reconciling initiative by the death of Christ on the cross as the result of his obedient life to God (Rom. 5:19), becomes not only the very act and pronouncement of reconciliation of humanity with God, but also the ground and model for reconciling relationships among people.... [T]he faithfulness and obedience of Jesus were particularly highlighted by Paul as a model to be followed. Christ's story is not only his own story but includes the story of the believers. By virtue of their participation in Christ, believers can live rightly and be active actors, as the story of Christ is being unfolded in their midst.[269]

In this case, the only sense in which believers participate in the past event of Christ's death is that they consciously identify with it.[270]

While many scholars who understand Jesus' death as salvific through what it reveals reject penal substitution or ontological interpretations of his work, others attempt instead to combine these interpretations. Virtually all of those who hold to the notion of penal substitution recognize that there is an exemplary aspect to Christ's death, although this is secondary to its primary purpose of obtaining divine forgiveness for others. Ladd, for example, writes:

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266. Ziesler, *Meaning*, 165-66. See also P. H. Towner, "The Present Age in the Eschatology of the Pastoral Epistles," *NTS* 32 (1986): 430.

267. McKnight, *Jesus*, 360-61.

268. Robert Hamerton-Kelly, "Sacred Violence and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.13): The Death of Christ as a Sacrificial Travesty," *NTS* 36 (1990): 98, 101.

269. Constantineanu, *Social Significance*, 208.

270. On the idea that believers are saved by identifying with Christ's death, see also Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 223, 233.

> The moral influence of Christ's death on the lives of people is not to be ignored because the teaching has been abused and wrongly made the central truth of the atonement.... The main significance of Christ's death is to be found in its objective character as a propitiatory, substitutionary sacrifice, the benefits of which are to be received by faith as a gracious gift; but the subjective influence of his death in arousing the response of love in the hearts of men and women can be neither denied nor ignored.[271]

As mentioned above, however, if the basis upon which one's sins are forgiven is solely the substitutionary death of Christ and not anything believers themselves do, then while the cross may arouse a response of love in human hearts, this love plays no role whatsoever in their salvation. The same problem arises when one attempts to combine a physical view of Christ's work with a revelational view. If people are saved by virtue of the ontological transformation that has taken place in them as a result of their union with Christ's death and resurrection, then while they may be renewed ethically, this is the consequence not of the cross per se, but of the ontological transformation in them that it has brought about. This is true whether their salvation is seen as a natural and intrinsic consequence following upon that transformation or as the result of a divine judgment or decision. If the divine judgment or decision is based on their ethical behavior, and the role of the cross is that of bringing about such behavior through the revelation it provides, then salvation is not attributed to any type of ontological transformation resulting directly from Jesus' death and resurrection. Ultimately, therefore, if salvation depends on an ethical change in believers and this change is attributed to the revelation communicated through Jesus, it makes no sense to claim that it is also the result of some ontological transformation produced in believers through their union with Christ's death and resurrection.

Theological Problems and Presuppositions

The idea that the purpose of Christ's death was to bring about an ethical change in human beings through what it reveals has been criticized on a variety of grounds.[272] Nevertheless, for our purposes here, there are two presuppositions that are problematic.

> **Premise 1: Christ's death was necessary because what it revealed to human beings could not have been revealed by God in any other way.**

Whatever Christ's life, passion, death, and resurrection are said to reveal to human beings, the question arises as to whether it was possible for that revelation to have been given in some other way. Was Jesus' crucifixion really the only way in which people could come to know of the "faithfulness, love, and paradoxical power of God," or that God could "disclose and thus disarm"

271. Ladd, *Theology*, 474.

272. See, for example, Brown and Parker, "For God So Loved," 11-13.

sacred violence?[273] Was it absolutely necessary for Jesus to die in order for others to have something to "re-enact" or to die metaphorically to sin and rise to a new way of living? Could not God have accomplished the same purposes through other human beings or by acting in other ways in human history? The claim that what was revealed through Christ's death could have been revealed by God in no other way is not based on anything found in the New Testament, where no such arguments for necessity are found, but is instead a presupposition.

Premise 2: Christ's death was necessary because there was no other way in which God could have brought about in human beings the ethical transformation necessary for them to be saved.

Can we really say that "*only* with that event do humans—Jews as well as gentiles—have the possibility of living in a faithful relationship with God"?[274] Did not people have the possibility of living in such a relationship prior to and independently of Christ's death, as was the case with Old Testament figures such as Abraham, Moses, and Elijah? The New Testament never claims explicitly that only through Christ is it possible for people to live in accordance with God's will and be declared righteous by God on that basis. In fact, passages such as Luke 1:5-6, 2:25, Acts 10:34-35, and Rom. 2:9-16 imply that in New Testament thought it was indeed possible to live righteously in God's sight prior to and independently of any faith in Jesus' death. Thus the notion that, outside of Christ's death, there was no other way for God to bring about in people the righteousness and obedience that God desired and demanded has no clear biblical basis but once again involves a presupposition.

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In the end, all of the interpretations of the salvific significance of Jesus' death that we have examined in this chapter are problematic for different reasons. Here we have noted the *theological* difficulties that these various views raise. However, the *historical* difficulties associated with these views have yet to be addressed. These difficulties revolve around the question of whether any of these understandings of Jesus' death have any basis in New Testament thought or can be traced back to Jesus' first followers. That question will be considered throughout the remainder of this work.

273. Gorman, *Apostle*, 135; Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 81.

274. Robin Scroggs, "Salvation History," 225 (emphasis added).